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# How Can God Answer Prayer?

*Being an exhaustive treatise on the Nature,  
Conditions and Difficulties  
of Prayer*

BY

WILLIAM EDWARD BIEDERWOLF

Author of "A Help to the Study of The Holy Spirit," "The Growing Christian," "The White Life," etc.

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**TO MY WIFE**

THROUGH WHOSE CHEERFUL SACRIFICE AND HELPFUL COM-  
PANIONSHIP THE HOURS OF STUDY DEVOTED  
TO THIS VOLUME WERE MADE  
POSSIBLE AND JOYOUS



## FOREWORD

There has always been a tendency on the part of some to look upon prayer as a sort of spiritual gymnastic, its sole purpose being idealistic. To pray, they tell us, is to become like the One whom we contemplate in the exercise. This idea of prayer is not without its sanction. Even noted physicians like Dr. Hyslop tell us that the effect of prayer on the mind is more beneficial than any other therapeutic agent known. But these pages are written to show that the whole truth is far from being found in any such theory of prayer, and to put the emphasis where it rightly belongs.

Another purpose of this book has been to answer such questions as may arise in the mind of every thoughtful Christian as he contemplates this mighty privilege of making known his requests unto God, and to make clear so far as possible the per-

plexities which for him may have gathered about this sacred duty. The author has been permitted to write some things for which he has looked in vain elsewhere and which he sincerely believes will be a real help to many inquiring souls.

Grateful to God for the long hours of study he has been permitted to enjoy upon this subject, and for the help that has come into his own life from it, he sends out these printed pages with a prayer that the subject of which they treat may have a richer and fuller meaning and its privilege become immeasurably sweeter for every one who may read them.

WILLIAM EDWARD BIEDERWOLF.

# WHAT THE VOLUME CONTAINS

## BOOK ONE

### INTRODUCTORY

✓ I. The Privilege of Praying . . . . .	13
II. Prayer Universal . . . . .	16
✓ III. The Neglect of Prayer . . . . .	20
IV. Why We Pray so Little . . . . .	24

## BOOK TWO

### THE NATURE AND VALUE OF PRAYER

I. The Scripture Idea of Prayer . . . . .	37
II. The Influence of Prayer on Man . . . .	49
III. The Influence of Prayer on God . . . .	65

## BOOK THREE

### HOW CAN GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

I. Is It Consistent with God's Exalted Dignity and Man's Insignificance? . . . .	81
II. Why Pray if the Benevolent God Knows What We Need? . . . . .	89
III. Can God in Order to Answer Prayer Interfere with Natural Law? . . . .	91
IV. Why Pray if Everything Is Predeter- mined by God? . . . . .	104

## BOOK FOUR

## HOW TO PRAY

I. The Holy Spirit Helping Our Infirmity	125
II. If Ye Abide In Me, Ask What Ye Will	152
III. Whatsoever Ye Ask In My Name . . .	164
IV. If Ye Ask Anything According to His Will . . . . .	178
V. When Ye Pray Believe . . . . .	197
VI. Importunity in Prayer. . . . .	215

## BOOK FIVE

I. Why Our Prayers Are Not Answered .	229
---------------------------------------	-----

## BOOK SIX

I. A Study in Words . . . . .	257
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Book One  
Introductory



# How Can God Answer Prayer?

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## I

### THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYING

*“Wherefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”—HEB. 4: 16.*

What an unspeakable privilege! the approach of you or me, weak, insignificant children of a day, into the presence of the everlasting God. “Men ought always to pray.” The Word of God speaks plainly about the matter. It is an imperative duty. And yet it is the duty of living up to our privilege rather than the perfunctory fulfillment of an obligation to which expression is given; hence we find our Lord not so much enjoining the duty as teaching how to best realize the privilege in our own experience.

Prayer a  
privilege as  
well as a  
duty.

And what a privilege it is! Is there not some mistake about it? Is it possible that God from His throne in the heavens can

## 14 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

find any delight in my worship, or any inclination to commune with me, or any time to bow down his ear to the voice of my supplication! Is it possible that this little creature to whom has been given the brief existence of a day can have free access to the audience room of the eternal God and there urge upon Him the infinitesimal interests of my vanishing life? Is it not presumption to think that the importunate pleadings of so insignificant a being can have any influence with Him upon whom are the concerns of this vast unmeasured universe? No, there is no

God's ear  
always ready  
to listen. mistake about it. Other thrones may be guarded; approach may be difficult, may be fatal, but from the throne of God the golden scepter of His grace is ever held out, and for every true suppliant the Eternal King has a patient, listening ear, and into His presence we are not only invited but urged to come boldly that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need.

Precious privilege! to have my praise

accepted, my petition heard, yea, to abide in His presence and there to commune as with a friend. How ought the heart to swell with gratitude, how ought the soul rejoice, and how zealous ought we all to be in unceasingly claiming this unspeakable privilege for ourselves.

“My God ! is any hour so sweet,  
From blush of morn to evening star,  
As that which calls me to Thy feet—  
The hour of Prayer?

“Lord ! till I reach that blissful shore,  
No privilege so dear shall be,  
As thus my inmost soul to pour  
In prayer to Thee !”

## II

### PRAYER UNIVERSAL

*“O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”*—Ps. 65: 2.

If reaching out after a Supreme Being is prayer and bowing down to idols is religion, then prayer has ever been coëx-tensive with the idea of religion; then men have always prayed. Prayer is an instinct. Wherever men have believed in a

Prayer a  
universal  
instinct.

Higher Power—and such belief has always been universal—there they have not waited for an argument to prove the possibility of entering into converse with such a Being, but have taken for granted and acted upon the privilege of so doing.

Rather than a command from the Deity, prayer has been a specific demand of man's own nature. Prayer is the heart of religion. Prayer *is* religion. It is the connecting link between God and man.

If you could lift yourself far above the earth and look down upon its people, you would see them everywhere bowing down to the Being whom they conceive to be their God. The Mohammedan in his Mosque, the Jew in his Synagogue, the heathen in his Temple, everywhere, upon lonely deserts and wild promontories, in crowded cities and costly cathedrals, you would see them praying. An ancient historian has said that you could travel the world over and find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without wealth, without schools or theaters, but a city without a temple or where people did not pray you would never see.

What is true of other religions is true of our own. The Christian is preëminently a person of prayer; not that he did not pray before, but that what was *then* a blind instinct becomes *now* an intelligent principle. What *then* was a dictate of his own nature gives place *now* to the promptings of God's Spirit within him. What *then* he was led to do out of sheer necessity,

## 18 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

he *now* esteems the sweetest of all his privileges. What *then* he sought by sacrifice

**The  
difference  
between  
heathen and  
Christian  
prayer.**

and penance he *now* obtains as a gracious bestowal in answer to his petition. What *then* he undertook with fainting heart he *now* pursues with boldness by the “new and living way.” What *then* he sought to use as a means toward temporal blessing becomes *now* the channel of spiritual grace as well. What *then* was a mere pleading in his own behalf becomes *now* a gracious intercession for others as well. What *then* was mere asking of an infinitely removed Divinity is *now* the most intimate communion with the God and Father of us all. This is the difference between heathen prayer and Christian prayer.

Deprive the unregenerate man of prayer, and though his prayers avail not you make

**Prayer is  
the nerve  
of the  
religious  
life.**

him miserable and forlorn; deprive the Christian of prayer and you not only deprive him of his sweetest privilege and dearest solace, but you take from him the

key that open sets the storehouse of his God; you not only take away his chief support, but you cut the nerve of his religious life; you rob him of his “vital breath.”

“For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them  
friend?

For so the whole round world is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

### III

#### THE NEGLECT OF PRAYER

*“Ye have not, because ye ask not.”—JAS. 4: 2.*

If prayer be so great a privilege and one so universally recognized, what more reasonable expectation than to find people everywhere and always praying? More especially would we expect to find this true of the Christian. With his more intelligent understanding of what prayer is and what it means for the soul, it ought not be surprising if he be found always at it.

And yet, alas! for the number of God's people for whom prayer is but the cry of a child in distress. Possibly the The poverty  
that despoils  
the soul. life is not without the form of prayer — a sentence of thanks for general mercies on retiring and a brief petition for protection through night's defenceless hours — but let the storm come and like the heathen and the atheist it

drives us to our knees in earnest appeal to God.

But even then we ofttimes do not pray. The form is there, a certain earnestness and agony of soul are there, but the elements that make prayer real are wanting. He who does not pray when the sun shines knows not how to pray when the clouds arise. But how many of us do pray in sunshine as well as shadow? How many of us are not only stirring ourselves up to take hold on God in crisal times, but are giving heed to God's injunction to "pray without ceasing"? With how many of us is prayer a habit of the soul?

Is it not the deplorable lack of the church to-day that we pray so little? On every hand comes the sad confession. Let that one to whom these pages come answer for himself or herself—

What place has prayer in your <sup>A pertinent inquiry.</sup> life? Is the secret of His presence the place where your soul delights to hide, or is it the thought that you *ought* to pray out of respect to the divine

command that takes you betimes to your knees?

God says, "Ask and ye shall receive." Prayer is the appointed means for bringing the blessing of heaven down to earth. God is just standing in heaven's portal, more ready than an earthly parent to give good gifts to His children, and with His hands full of choicest favor is saying, "Ask what I shall give thee." What more grateful to His heart than the confidence which leads His children to ask these favors at His hand? What more unfilial than to ignore the yearning of His great heart to give?

If God's Word is true as to what prayer has done and will do; if what we read that prayer has wrought as it "moved the arm that moves the world" is true, where further need we look for what the church needs to-day to make His will prevail throughout the earth?

The need of the church and the source of supply. If history be true, God's great men were all men of prayer. Prayer is the channel

of power. It is true what Macgregor once said, that, "So important a factor is prayer in Christian experience, that the history of a man's progress in the Divine life is just the history of his progress in the knowledge and in the use of prayer."

And yet we pray so little. Why is it?  
"Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this  
wrong,  
Or others—that we are not always strong;  
That we are ever overborne with care;  
That we should ever weak or heartless be,  
Anxious or troubled, while with us is prayer,—  
And joy, and strength, and courage are with  
Thee?"

## IV

### WHY WE PRAY SO LITTLE

*“Could ye not watch with me one hour?”*—  
MATT. 26: 40.

Why do we pray so little? Why is prayer so much neglected? More answers than one have been given to the question, though each needs all the rest to make the answer all-complete. Three reasons, among them all most prominent, suggest themselves to me:

1. The first, which is after all the greatest and most inclusive, is *our natural dislike for prayer*. Who can doubt it was the first man's chiefest joy to hold converse with his God. What delightful hours those must have been, those first sweet days, when Adam, with soul all pure and clean, could meet his Maker in communion face to face. But Adam sinned, and straightway something took hold of

Man's  
perverted  
nature leads  
to the  
forgetfulness  
of God.

Adam's God-like nature and twisted it and left it ever after predisposed to that which was crooked and distorted. It left him unable to please God (Rom. 8:8), unable to love God (Rom. 8:7), or to know the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). It was the same thing Paul had when he said, "When I would do good, evil is ever present with me"; the same thing that has been with us all through all the years since the first man's sin. It is our *perverted* human nature,—the carnal life,—the self-life, and although there is freedom from it (Rom. 8:2), it is, alas! ever ready to assert itself and carry the mind in the very moment of communion away to the vain pleasures and perplexing business of the world.

The holiest souls of earth have confessed that such disturbance is not unfrequent in their devotions, and unless the tendency of the self-life be checked by the overmastering presence of the Christ-life, we are going to find our whole lives

The holiest  
saints  
disturbed  
in their  
devotions.

given to such things as tend not only to make prayer an uninviting duty instead of a joyful soul-absorbing privilege, but to make any prolonged communion a series of earthly interruptions.

“Never any more wonder,” says an old writer, “that men so seldom pray, for there are very few that feel the relish, and are enticed with the deliciousness, and refreshed with the comforts, and acquainted with the secrets of a holy prayer.” And why? Simply because the self-life, which has created the natural dislike for prayer, has put a rake in the hands of so many of God’s children to-day and set them scratching in the muck of the earth. Well has Austin Phelps asked, “Who is it that has said, ‘I will make them *joyful* in my house of prayer?’”

2. The second reason for the present-day lack of prayer is *the awful rush of modern life*. “Evening, morning and <sup>No time</sup> noon will I pray,” said David, <sup>for prayer.</sup> but most people are too busy for that in these strenuous times. A man

hardly has time to stop and tie his shoe-string, and we are allowing the rush of things to steal our minds away from God.

One does not need a cloister to commune with God. He can make, he ought to make, "the common round, the trivial task," the tiresome toil of business life, the joyful sport of field or home a ministry for Christ even as the service in the sanctuary, and in them all find fellowship with God. Yea, more, behind desk or counter or on the busy street brushing sleeves with our hurrying fellows, you can for a moment, from time to time, build an altar and be alone with God.

One can  
pray  
anywhere.

But all this we are sure will not be enough for the one who would know God intimately and who would experience the fulness of His strength for the toil, the trial and the temptation of life's every day. Such a one needs more time where with life's busy cares and fretting noise shut out he can be quiet before his God.

But, you say, "How can I spare the time?" How can you afford *not* to spare it? You, a professing Christian, and not find time to pray! Wherefore hath God given you all the time there is save to implore His mercy and do His will? Take time!! You never lack for time to implore

Seeing things from the right perspective. and importune those who hold earth's favors in their hands, and yet, O God! no time to receive the eternal mercies from heaven's gracious King. Do the concerns of this world outweigh those of the next? If God ministers to the fowls of the air, that neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, must you neglect your soul that your body may not starve? Time was never given us to waste, but its rigid monopoly to material interests is cheating the heart out of its chiefest joys and robbing life of all its beauty and its sweetness.

Take time for other things! Take time for the good-bye kiss! It will leave a lighter heart behind and send a braver one forth to the struggles of the day. Take

time to be agreeable. The interest it will bear as the years go by you will some day find to be larger than all the worldly emoluments you have sought so hard to gain. Take time to show a little appreciation. It was only a bunch of dandelions, but the little one thought they were the sweetest of the flowers, and she meant them all for you. To have kissed her for them, much-occupied mother, would have been quite as easy as to have said, "Too busy to be bothered." It would have paid a thousand times more than any tidy home without a mother's caress. Take time to get acquainted with the family. Your companionship, busy father, may be worth a good deal more to your boy, who is now almost a stranger to you, than your fortune; the latter is a doubtful blessing. Take time to encourage the down-hearted brother. Its income will be better than gold in the day when the angels of God stoop down to bind up your own broken heart.

Take time to pray. Even so the Mas-

Taking time  
for things  
that pay.

ter did. It will make you a braver and a better man.

“No time to pray!

Oh, who so fraught with earthly care  
As not to give to humble prayer  
Some part of day?

“No time to pray!

What heart so clean, so pure within,  
That needeth not some check from sin,  
Needs not to pray!

“No time to pray!

’Mid each day’s dangers, what retreat  
More needful than the mercy-seat?  
Who need not pray?

“No time to pray!

Must care or business’ urgent call  
So press us as to take it all,  
Each passing day?

“What thought more drear

Than that our God His face should hide,  
And say, through all life’s swelling tide,  
No time to hear!”

A note of warning may well be sounded here to the busy minister and those given

to special forms of religious work. With all these demands upon us, the sermon that *must* be written, the letters that *must* be answered, the calls that *must* be made, the unexpected that *must* be attended to, how little time we have for prayer.

In Andrew Murray's first chapter on the "Ministry of Intercession" he has called attention to the confession that came up on every side from the ministers and workers in convention as to the little place that closet prayer had occupied in their busy lives, and they were wondering how, with all the pressure of duty, they could ever hope for much change. But, Beloved, if it is God's work we are doing and He has told us to give ourselves somewhat to prayer, will He not take care of that work while we are doing it?

The sad  
confession  
of the  
ministry.

If we are to believe the records that have come down to us, then God's most useful men have mostly been those who, according to their own testimony, had so much to do they could not get along with-

out several hours of prayer each day; if they could not be found at one time, they were found at another. It is said of J.

**Alone with  
God in  
the early  
hours.** Hudson Taylor that he rose at three o'clock in the morning that he might spend two hours alone with God before the *other* business of the day broke in upon him. Note you, that of praying he made a business, too.

If God calls to prayer, all other calls for the time being are calls of men, and if God is waiting to meet us and to better prepare us for the work that lies before us, it would certainly seem the part of wisdom as well as duty to wait on God before we go.

Oh, how few the hours before the day is done, and when perchance there comes an hour on which some duty does not lay immediate demand, what books we fain would read and feel we ought to, what lines of study follow out. But after all, I wonder if a little less study and a little more prayer wouldn't make better preachers out of us anyhow. I wonder if, after all, the amount of real success may not be

measured somewhat by the amount of real prayer in our lives. And when we think of the solemn service to which we have been dedicated, with its holy functions, its vast responsibilities, its issues of life and death, with its perplexities and its trials, how much we need the nearest presence and the fullest strength of our God which comes to us and which we take with us from the place of prayer.

The strength  
of God  
made over  
to man.

“I pray for strength, O God!  
To bear all loads that on my shoulders press  
Of thy directing or Thy chastening rod,

Lest from their growing stress  
My spirit sink in utter helplessness.

“I pray for strength to run  
In duty’s narrowest paths, nor turn aside  
In broader ways that glow in pleasure’s sun,

Lest I grow satisfied,  
Where Thou from me Thy smiling face must hide.

“I pray for strength to wait  
Submissively when I can not see my way,  
Or if my feet would haste, some close-barred gate

Bids my hot zeal delay,  
Or to some by-path turns their steps astray.

“I pray for strength to live  
To all life’s noble ends, prompt, just and true;  
Myself, my service, unto all to give,

And, giving, yet renew  
My store for bounty of life’s journey through.

“I pray, O God, for strength,  
When, as life’s love and labors find surcease,  
Cares, crosses, burdens to lay down at length,

And so, with joy’s increase,  
To die, if not in triumph—in Thy peace.”

3. The third reason for our lack of prayer is that *we realize so little the value of prayer*. Doubtless no Christian would excuse himself by saying, What good will it do? But he is all the while impoverishing himself by failing to realize how much good it really will do. This brings up the whole question as to what prayer is and <sup>God’s idea of prayer.</sup> what God meant it should be to the Christian. This opens a most interesting field of investigation to which we urge your attention in the immediately following pages.

Book Two  
The Nature and Value of Prayer



# I

## THE SCRIPTURE IDEA OF PRAYER

*“What profit shall we have, if we pray to Him?”*  
—JOB. 21: 15.

Frederick W. Robertson, in his sermon on Prayer, says: “Prayer is one thing and petition is quite another,” but in reality prayer and petition are quite one and the same thing.

The first essential to intelligent argument is clear definition, and before either of the above statements which are so plainly contradictory can be rightly appreciated it becomes necessary to know just what idea of prayer is entertained by those making them. What is prayer? Evidently Mr. Robertson’s idea of prayer is something quite removed from petition or supplication. Prayer is commonly conceived to be communion with God. But what does the word itself mean and what

clear  
definition  
the first  
essential to  
intelligent  
argument.

is the first and root meaning of its equivalents as used in the Word of God? This is without doubt the surest way and the safest to discover the essential nature of this exercise we commonly call prayer.

That prayer primarily means petition, supplication or entreaty, the etymology of the word makes certain; it means neither

The etymology of the word. to meditate nor to commune nor even to talk with another person, but it does mean to petition something at his hand. This is not only true of the word in English, but of its equivalent in all other languages, and if you will trace its origin you will find it comes from the same root as the Sanscrit word *praach*, which means *to ask*.

Usage, however, has given to the word a much wider meaning, no less than five Greek words in the New Testament and twelve Hebrew words in the Old Testament being translated *prayer*.

This is, however, natural when we think for a moment of what is involved in asking anything at the hand of God. When ap-

proach to God is made various thoughts and emotions stir the soul to which expression are most naturally given. One cannot contemplate God without being overwhelmed at His infinite and awe inspiring greatness, without becoming deeply sensible to His boundless graciousness and humbly repentant of the wrong done to Him. How especially is this true and how appropriate its expression when we come as a suppliant for His favor.

Hence prayer is usually divided into the following component parts: Adoration, Thanksgiving, Confession and Petition. This suggests a splendid order for the expression of what is doubtless in the mind of every one as he comes to God, though there can be nothing stereotyped in so vital a matter. Some of the most effective prayers in the Bible are simple, earnest cries for mercy; but the Bible abounds with prayers in which something of the order noted is observed.

But since it is quite as proper for the

why the  
idea of  
prayer is  
made so  
broad.

soul to approach God without being urged into His presence by some petition it would bring, we have even come to define prayer more broadly as *Communion*, by which simple address to or talking with God is understood. The first meaning of communion is something else (partnership, sharing), but it is used twenty-eight times in the English Version as a translation of Hebrew and Greek <sup>Prayer as</sup> ~~communion~~ words which mean to *speak* or *talk*. In Exodus 25:22, where it is said, "I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat," the word is DABAR, which literally means *to speak*.

Some have thought to still further weaken the conception of prayer by calling it *religious meditation*, but if by such expression is meant mere thinking about God, it is not prayer in any sense of the word; it is not even religious; but if by meditation is meant such exercise of mind and soul as involve the sentiments and disposition mentioned a moment ago and which are sure to arise with any one who

has even a half-conception of the real character of God (and the writer knows of no other kind of <sup>Prayer as</sup> <sup>meditation.</sup> religious meditation), then, even as communion, such exercise may be defined as prayer, for whether such sentiments and disposition be audibly uttered or silently felt it is, after all, an approach to God in which the mind and heart and soul commune with Him.

The trouble with such definitions of prayer is that they are partial, and, like all other half-truths, often work serious injury to the whole truth.

Granting now for the moment that the element of petition may be legitimately eliminated from prayer, "What profit shall we have if we pray to Him?" What benefit is there in thus communing with God?

Now, we would not for one moment insinuate that no practical results come from such praying, but we do mean to say that they are hardly to be compared with those that follow when petition, which is the

very heart of prayer, is allowed its true place in the communion we have with God. Without petition the benefit is plainly limited to the effect upon the mind and character of the one who prays; but even this is limited in comparison with the same benefit as derived from prayer in its truest and most vital sense. Directing the mind and soul toward any superhuman object or fixing them upon any lofty ideal will naturally result in healthy reaction upon the one so engaged. And to contemplate the divine greatness of the Most High God, to mention before Him His boundless providence and to acknowledge His excellent wisdom in all His rulings must of necessity leave with the human soul a greater sense of its own littleness and a correspondingly greater humility of mind, a deeper gratitude of heart and a holier submission to Him who worketh all things together for good.

All this we would not underestimate; much less deny. Indeed, this subjective

The reflex  
influence  
of prayer  
greater with  
the idea  
of petition  
involved.

effect of prayer might be still further analyzed and doubtless many other elements of worth discovered. We do not say it would be improper to speak here of a certain calmness of temper, of certain freedom from distraction, of sympathies and self-disinterestedness and other traits of moral excellence, all of which touch the character with a beauty that is much worth while.

But what we would have the reader now to appreciate, and what many who have thought more profoundly on this subject than we presume to have done have failed to discover is this, that not only are such effects themselves very much heightened when due place is given in prayer to petition, but that with petition eliminated there would be but little if any communion with God at all; not that one only goes to God when he has a petition to offer (for there is much communion without petition), but that if a man had any sort of assurance that such approach of the soul to God as commun-

Petition a  
great  
promoter of  
communion.

ion involves was being made to a Supreme Being whose ear was deaf and whose heart indifferent to our cries of distress and our petitions for help or hearing could not help us because of the inevitable course of things over which He has no control, the probability is that that man would soon begin to incline toward a state of dumb resignation to the inevitable, which in turn would rapidly tend toward the neglect of prayer altogether. We pray too little as it is. If with Frederick W. Robertson we

Frederick W. Robertson's idea of prayer. see in prayer only such contemplation of the character of God as ends with the resignation of ourselves to His will, most men, we fear, would not put themselves even to such effort to obtain it. They would be more likely to accept the inevitable and devote the time otherwise required for such contemplation to making the best out of a condition of affairs for which there is no help, at least from above.

But, on the contrary, to know that God hears my cry for help as well as my voice

in praise and thanksgiving and confession, and that like as a father He not only pitith His children but, having the power, He giveth unto them what would not be theirs but for the asking, then indeed are we constrained to come to Him, not alone with our petitions but with the expression of grateful hearts; then indeed are we drawn into His presence by that very fact, not only in the hour of special need but continually, even as with the closest friend; how much sweeter and more intimate fellowship with such a God than with the one contemplated a moment ago. Now that true prayer not only includes petition, but that petition is the very heart of Petition the  
heart of  
Scriptural  
prayer. prayer, even a cursory glance into Scripture will show.

Of the five Greek words in the New Testament which the translators have chosen to translate *prayer*, the primary meaning of the three most frequently used (DEOMAI, ten times; EROTAO, seven times; EUCHOMAI, eighty-five times) is to peti-

tion, to ask, to supplicate. Of the other Greek words for prayer. two words so translated and used but once each, one (ENTUXIS, to hold converse with) is used in the sense of thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:5); the other (PARAKALEO, to call along side of) is used in the specific sense of a petition for help (Matt. 26:53).

But apart from the fact that the primary meaning of the word prayer is petition; apart also from the fact that one hundred and two times in the New Testament (to say nothing of the numerous instances of the Old Testament), are foreign words whose primary meaning is also petition translated prayer, thirty-three times in the New Testament and thirty-nine in the Old Testament we Biblical translations and synonyms for prayer. find the simple word *ask* (which is the exact translation of its foreign equivalents) used to describe the act of going to God in prayer. As we think this over we wonder if we are not wasting words and time in proving that prayer means primarily

petition. Of course it means petition, and when the great prayer Teacher said, "Ask and ye shall receive," He most assuredly meant that we were to obtain something through our asking.

How much richer and fuller, we again remark, is the meaning of prayer when thus correctly understood. The word is now big with meaning, and when one thus sees it to be his privilege to make known his requests before a God who will concern Himself about their answer all the other inducements into His presence are much intensified, it seems to me, and not until we have thus fully realized all that prayer involves are we in a position to fully realize how valuable the exercise is.

With these thoughts on the nature of prayer in our mind, let us see what answer can be given to the question standing at the head of this chapter: "What profit shall we have if we pray to Him?" We are now prepared to see that the value of prayer is, (1) in its reflexive or natural effect on the soul, and

The twofold  
value of  
prayer.

## 48 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

(2) in its direct efficacy in securing what we ask of God. These two phases of the value of prayer may properly form the substance of separate chapters.

## II

### THE INFLUENCE OF PRAYER ON MAN

*“It is good for me to draw near to God.”—Ps. 73: 28.*

Even Professor Tyndall, with all his skepticism, has said: “It is not my habit of mind to think otherwise than solemnly of the feelings which prompt to prayer. Often unreasonable, even contemptible, in its purer forms prayer hints at disciplines which few of us can neglect without moral loss.” How true it is that we need but compare the life and bearing of the Christian much given to prayer with that of the one who thus communes but little with his Lord in order to see the quickening, purifying and elevating effects of prayer upon the soul.

The  
difference  
between  
a prayerful  
and a non-  
prayerful  
life.

When Mrs. Browning asked Charles Kingsley the secret of his beautiful life, saying, “tell me that I may make mine beautiful, too,” he replied, “I had a

friend." God pity the man who even in earthly associations has not had the companionship of some pure and genuine soul; for there are natures in close communion with whom we are conscious of a sort of baptism and consecration binding us over to a life pure and genuine like their own. Think, then, what unceasing communion with God must mean — how the soul is fixed in steadfast gaze upon His image and glory, "until," as another has said, "that image is daguerreotyped, as it were, on the soul; nay, till the soul itself is "changed into the same image, from glory unto glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Many have doubtless read the beautiful story of the young girl who wore about her neck a locket that contained the secret of her own pure and beautiful life. Her character was so ripe in its loveliness that her friends wondered while they admired. Into the locket that hung continually about her neck no one had been permitted to look.

The secret  
of a beauti-  
ful life.

At length, however, in an hour of sickness, one of her closest friends was allowed to open the sacred ornament, and there she saw the words, "Whom having not seen I love." That was the secret of her heavenly life; communion with the unseen Christ whom she loved had transfigured her life into a likeness with His own. To pray is to become Christ-like.

But what are some of the more particular effects of prayer on the soul? It would be a lengthy task even to endeavor to mention them all, but here are some of the best:

1. Prayer enables us to *realize the presence of God*. Austin Phelps begins his little classic on "The Still Hour" by quoting from Bishop Hall his lament, "If God had not said, Blessed are those that hunger, I know not what could keep weak Christians from sinking in despair. Many times, all I can do is to complain that I want Him, and wish to recover Him." In commenting on this pathetic utterance Austin Phelps says it only echoes the well-known

Realizing  
the presence  
of God.

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come down through all living hearts from the old patriarch when he cried, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." This awful consciousness of the absence of God is what, so many complain, makes religious life so unreal. But was it not the Holy Spirit who said, "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you"? and is not this a special promise for the hour of prayer?

He has promised to manifest Himself to those who love Him and those who really love Him will not find communion with Him tedious and irksome, for in such sweet hours it is that God becomes real as at no other time; in such hours so close does God draw nigh that you can close your eyes and see Him; in such hours

A road that is open to every traveller. we are veritably on the road to Emmaus, but we know with whom we are going. We hear

others tell how they enjoy the presence of God, and we covet a like experience for ourselves, but this is no privilege for the favored few; what has been for

others in this respect is also for you and me. There is a road to such experience; it is that

“ . . . Sweet hour of prayer  
That calls us from a world of care.”

If we would experience with Edwards that inward sense of the Divine Presence which he describes as a “calm, sweet abstraction of soul from the concerns of this world in which he found himself rapt and swallowed up in God,” it must be found in the self - same way that Edwards found it.

Truly one can see God in everything, but, after all, one can see Him best with his eyes shut. Some one has said that prayer is a closing of the eyes on things seen and opening them on things unseen. There is a legend which represents Saint Bridget engaged in holy conversation with a devout but blind nun called Dara. It was in the evening as the sun was going down, and as they talked of God and Jesus and of heaven they did not notice the

hours go by until the sun came back in the morning and threw his golden light over the beautiful landscape, and then Bridget wished

Seeing with  
the eyes of  
the soul.  
that Dara might see the beauties which God had made. She prayed and touched Dara's eyes and they were opened. Dara looked at the golden sun, at the rare landscape that stretched before her, at the flowers glistening with dew drops that shone like jewels, and all the glory that was spread about her. After a while she said, "Now close my eyes again, for when the world is so visible to the eyes, God appears less clearly to the soul."

There is a lesson here for you and me. As much as God speaks to us in the beauties and wonders of the world, it is sometimes well to shut out even the glories of nature that brighter visions still of God may fill the soul.

2. *Prayer impresses the mind with the real character of God, and consequently tends to produce in us a disposition consistent therewith.*

(a) It produces holiness of heart. When prayer once brings man into the felt presence of his God and reveals to him something of God's own infinite holiness, His awe-inspiring purity and His perfect hatred of sin God's infinite holiness revealed. there, if anywhere, will he who prays learn to abhor himself, to loathe his own deep sinfulness, to repent, to cleanse his hands and purify his heart, "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

(b) It produces humility of mind — so ornamental to Christian character. Paul was like the rest of us in one respect: in danger of being "exalted above due measure." Job had a good deal to say about himself. It Man's insignificance made manifest. was all *Job*: what *Job* was and what *Job* had done, until God took him to task, told him to gird up his loins and answer a few questions, when Job learned his lesson—that he was but a worm as compared with God, and he went down in the dust and said, "I abhor myself." When we see God's greatness we recognize our own littleness.

(c) It produces peace of soul. It is written in the Word, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, for he trusteth in Thee." Trusting in Him is something altogether different from a dumb resignation to what occurs because there is no help for it. When we come to know the heart of God, whether we fully understand His mind or not,

**The peace  
that passes  
understand-  
ing.** we realize that He is a kind and compassionate and almighty Friend and that we can trust ourselves to Him amid all the storms and distractions of this world. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for thee," and you will find worry giving place to a calm and quiet resting upon God for everything which He knows is best for His child to have. Every praying Christian knows this is true. It is the prayerful Christian who can sing:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
And sorrows like sea billows roll,  
Whate'er be my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul."

(d) It produces that *submission of will* which is one of the chief conditions of acceptable approach unto God. More elements than one enter into true religion. To be truly religious is to do the will of God. But Liddon has shown us how prayer is also religion in action. To pray is not only to put the affections in motion, the will in motion, but the understanding in motion as well. Thus in prayer one comes to see that other interests than his own are in the hands of God, that what He asks might not in the end be best, and that in view of God's infinite wisdom He must know what is best, in view of His infinite justice He must do what is best, and in view of His perfect love He must desire what is best, and so believing with all his heart that even as God hath said, "All things work together for good to them that love Him," he can say with becoming grace, "Thy will, O God, and not mine, be done." God is always on our side; it is necessary

God's will  
made  
sweeter  
than man's  
own way.

God is  
always on  
our side.

sometimes to pray ourselves over to His side. It was Dr. Cuyler who said, "The pull of our prayer may not move the everlasting throne, but, like the pull on a line from the bow of a boat, it may draw us into closer fellowship with God and fuller harmony with His wise and holy will."

3. Prayer, *by directing the thoughts towards that which is holiest and best, tends to elevate and ennable the soul.* Paul tells us to think on things that are lovely and pure, on things that are honest and true, and to such things no man can direct his mind without becoming better for it. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he."

**The influence of a high ideal.** Even a man's face changes according to the nature of his thoughts and reflects the soul that has formed within him. It is Hillis who says, "He who sows foul thoughts shall reap the foul countenance of a fiend. He who sows pure thoughts shall reap the sweetness and nobility of the face of Fra Angelico." Thus prayer has also its physical effects.

4. Prayer tends to keep the soul sensitive to spiritual impression and receptive to spiritual influence. Some one has painted a picture of a woman mourning by the seaside. The look on her face is that of hopeless despair as she sits on the low rocks with her eyes fixed upon the black waters beneath which the treasures of her heart have gone down. Just above her almost touching her mourning robes hovers the shadowy form of an angel with a harp filling the air about her with the soft, sweet strains of music. But the woman, absorbed in dumb, unconscious grief, is not aware of the angel's nearness, nor does she hear the heavenly consolation his harp would speak.

Something not very different from that is sometimes true of us. We sometimes through neglect of prayer allow our minds and our hearts to become so centered on the earthly life about us, our eyes so fixed upon the dusty soil at our feet, that we are not

The open  
and recep-  
tive soul.

Look up  
and not  
down.

only often unconscious of what is and what otherwise would prove for us to be the very presence of God, but our spiritual senses, through lack of exercise, are unable to appreciate what in reality is the choicest good that can come from God. But not so the one who is “instant in prayer.” Such a one God always finds with a soul open and receptive into which He can pour the blessings of His Spirit and with a soul so cultivated that His blessings are rightly appreciated when they come.

The natural position of the hands when stretched out to God in prayer is with upturned palms as if to receive and hold the blessing they would have. This, too, is the attitude of the prayerful soul—ever upturned to receive what God will give.

5. *Prayer impresses the mind with a becoming sense of our dependence upon God.* He who is the source of our life, both physical and spiritual, is also the source of its sustenance. “In Him we live and move and have our being.” We

could not live without Him, neither in the one sense nor in the other. But if we were privileged to come to God but once in many months or years, how would we not become thoughtless of God in the busy endeavor to take care of ourselves? We might keep physically alive this way; animals do. But what about our spiritual life?

The source  
of life  
and power  
emphasized.

It was a command of Zoroaster that his followers should at stated times extinguish the fires on their hearths and rekindle them from the sacred fire in the temple in order that they might not forget that fire was a gift from heaven. How can we not remember this of the gift of spiritual life and strength as well as physical sustenance when we are privileged to "pray without ceasing," and are taught to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"?

6. *Prayer is a promoter of activity.* It puts us at the disposal of God for our part in bringing about the thing we have desired of Him. Unless we are thus ready

to be used of God we can have no guarantee that our praying has been in any sense acceptable. Prayer was

An earnest  
prayer  
will always  
lead to  
earnest  
effort.

never intended as a substitute for earnest self-sacrificing effort.

But do you think that any one can earnestly pray, "Thy kingdom come" and then use the

time God has given him as though he little cared whether it ever came or not? Do you think that any one could ever earnestly pray for the salvation of a friend without rising from his knees and seeking out if possible that friend that he might urge him to Christ and help him on his way to God? To pray in any other way may relieve somewhat the conscience of a not very conscientious Christian, but God is not deceived thereby. What labor cannot do prayer often will do, but prayer will never do what labor can do for itself, save as it inspires a man to such effort as may be necessary to do it.

A pastor once said to the young people of his congregation, "I want you to spend

fifteen minutes every day praying for missions; but beware how you pray, for I warn you it is a very costly experiment." "Costly!" they asked, in surprise. "Aye, <sup>The cost of praying for missions.</sup> cost-ly," he reiterated, "when Carey began to pray for the conversion of the world, it cost him himself, and it cost those who prayed with him very much. Brainerd prayed for the dark-skinned savages, and after two years of blessed work it cost him his life. Two students began to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth more servants into the harvest, and lo! it is going to cost our country five thousand young men and women who have, in answer to this prayer, pledged themselves to the work. Be sure, it is a serious thing to pray in earnest for this work; you will find that you cannot pray and withhold your labor, or pray and withhold your money; nay, that your very life will no longer be your own when your prayers begin to be answered."

Prayer always intensifies the heart's de-

sire and the very act of praying opens the eyes of the suppliant to the obligation upon him for the answer to the prayer he has offered.

### III

## THE INFLUENCE OF PRAYER ON GOD

*“The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”—  
JAS. 5: 16.*

*“Ask what I shall give thee.”—1 KINGS 3: 5.*

In the foregoing section we have seen some of what may be reasonably considered the reflex or subjective effects of prayer; that is, what prayer means indirectly to the one who prays.

But we have already said that prayer means primarily petition, and unless it can be shown that the world's uncounted supplicants are consciously practicing a species of trickery upon themselves with a view to their moral edification by offering up desires to God without any expectation of having them answered, or, on the other hand, be clearly proven that God is indisposed or unable to heed the cry of the human heart, may we not reasonably ex-

The direct  
efficacy  
of prayer.

pect that prayer has also an objective or direct efficacy, that it has, in other words, an influence on God Himself and leads Him to do for us what otherwise He would have no occasion to do?

What is the ground of this expectation?

1. The argument from *instinct* is not without weight. The belief that prayer is heard and answered is as universal as is the impulse itself to pray. The one is an instinct as well as the other. Never has beast or bird been led astray by their God-given instinct, and do you think that God would plant an instinct so holy in the human soul which either His indifference or His impotence would lead Him to disappoint? The imprisoned vine struggles away toward the cellar window and finds the light the unconscious impulse of its nature impels it to seek. The robin flies away before the winter's chill and finds the genial clime to which its inborn sense urged it on. Man's physical nature also has its God-given adaptability and ap-

The law of supply and demand in the world.

petency for just what is needed in order to its life. With these things God is lavish. The ear has but to listen; the world is full of sound. The eye has but to open; there is sunlight all around. The lungs have but to expand; the exhaustless air will fill them. The heart has but to unlock its fleshy door; the veins are at its threshold with blood. But what about man's spiritual nature? Must it alone be doomed to disappointment? Must the soul struggle on towards God and its eyes be left in darkness because heaven has no light to give? Must it soar up on wings of faith and hope and find no atmosphere in which to breathe and live? Must it strain its ears and catch no sound of heaven's voice or music? Must it breathe out its prayer to God and then suffocate for want of heaven's sweet elixir? Must it open its heart and wait for God to fill it and go away empty because God has no favors to bestow?

*The argument from analogy.*

2. There is argument from the very nature of God, if so be that He is a per-

sonal, kind-hearted, potent Being who can consistently grant the petition we desire of Him.

**There is a God.** (a) That there *is* a God we will not even stop to argue. We hope none of us are atheists.

**A personal God.** (b) That He is a *personal* Being is not worth the while to argue in these days of advanced thought, even if He were not so revealed in Scripture. Of course He is personal. Reason will not be satisfied with a God who is merely an unseen, unthinking, unfeeling force in the universe. Prayer to such a God would of course be fruitless.

**A kind-hearted God.** (c) That He is *kindhearted*: who for a moment could doubt it? Shall we, the creatures of His hand, be kind and considerate of each other, and He who planted such feelings in our breasts be Himself without them? Man's deepest feeling tells him God is good; the providence we experience proclaims it, and how tenderly is it revealed in Jesus and in His teachings about the Father-

hood of God; and shall an earthly parent know how to love his children and bestow good gifts upon them and the Divine Father be a stranger to an instinct of which He is the author in His offspring?

(d) That He is *potent*: how could He be otherwise and be the God of the universe? Shall He who made the elements not control them? Shall He "who made the universe by His power" be shut outside His own creation, a helpless spectator impotent to use the very laws of which He is the author?

(e) That He *can consistently* answer petition we shall see further on.

But we have something better than argument for our belief in this matter. We have the sure Word of the Lord.

3. We are commanded thus to pray and given specific promise of the answer. If prayer was intended for nothing more than its reflexive influence on the suppliant, what did the Lord mean by saying, "All things whatsoever ye *ask* in prayer, believing, *ye shall receive*"? (Matt.21: 22.)

What did the Master mean by saying, “**I**ye then being evil know how to give gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him”? (Matt. 7:11.) How any human being, with all his prejudice and all his preconceived ideas, can, in the face of such Scripture and a Bible full of other Scripture just like it—how he can honestly affirm that it is not God’s plan to bestow His favors for the right kind of asking, is the hard thing after all for the simple, believing spirit to understand.

The words of Christ no idle utterance.

For those who teach that the efficacy of prayer ceases with its reflexive influence there are some good words in Patton’s remarkable volume on “*Prayer and Its Answers.*” After quoting several passages from F. W. Robertson in which prayer is resolved into mere *submission*, and we are advised to “pray until prayer makes us cease to pray”; and after a passage from a letter of a ministerial friend who says,

“The true value of prayer is that it stops people from wanting what they can’t get,” Dr. Patton goes on to apply this theory to some of the Master’s teaching about prayer. We are told to *ask*, to *seek*, and to *knock*.

Dr. Patton's  
reply to Dr.  
Robertson.

“Imagine,” he says, “a child asking for some favor, or for the relief of some want, and standing hour after hour, repeating his requests, and being told by the father: ‘Go on asking, my child; it does you much good to ask. The longer you ask the more good it will do you. Do not expect to receive anything, however, as the principal benefit of asking is that, by and by, you will not want anything, and will cease to make any request.’ Imagine a mother seeking a lost child. She looks through the house and along the streets, then searches the fields and woods and examines the river banks. A wise neighbor meets her and says: ‘seek on; look everywhere; search every accessible place. You will not find, indeed, but then seeking

is a good thing. It puts the mind on the stretch; it fixes the attention; it aids observation; it makes the idea of the child very real. And then, after a while, you will cease to want your child.' Imagine a man knocking at the door of a house, long and loud. After he has done this for an hour, a window opens and the occupant of the house puts out his head and says: 'That is right, my friend; I shall not open the door, but then, keep on knocking. It is excellent exercise, and you will be the healthier for it. Knock away till sun-down, and then come and knock all day to-morrow. After some days thus spent you will attain to a state of mind in which you will no longer care to come in.' Is this what Jesus intended us to understand when He said, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' No doubt," says the author we have quoted, "one would thus soon cease to ask, to seek, and to knock; but would it not be from disgust?"

If prayer does not, cannot obtain, its very name and act is a mockery; and the injunction thus to pray a cruel deceit on the part of God.

4. But, again, we have occurring all about us the practical demonstration that God does answer prayer. The Bible is full of recorded instances and human history is packed with others. In this respect all saints have shared alike.

When Hannah came to God with definite request and earnestly prayed, God's priest bade her go in peace; in peace she went away and later came again, and to the priest she said, "Lord, my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. *For this child I prayed and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him.*" And this has been the experience of millions who have prayed the prayer of faith.

The matter  
practically  
demon-  
strated.

Prayer *does* influence God's actions in our favor. Prayer does "move the arm that moves the world." Prayer does have

a direct as well as an indirect effect; and the influence it thus exerts with God secures for us blessings both of a spiritual and a physical nature.

Think just a moment of the spiritual benefit: *The direct impartation of spiritual power* by which the soul is strengthened and invigorated for the life that God would have us live.

We recall just here the difficulty Hercules found in overcoming the giant Antaeus. He could slay the lion or any other shape of beast or man, but in Antaeus he

met more than his match, until at length he discovered the source of his strength and cutting the connection he slew his fierce antagonist. As long as Antaeus was in contact with the earth he was enriched with a power that made him victor over all who came against him. He was defeated by being lifted from the earth and crushed while in the air. So with him who puts himself in connection with God in prayer. Just how we cannot

The soul  
made strong  
by the  
direct im-  
partation of  
spiritual  
power.

Hercules  
overcoming  
Antaeus.

tell—we need not—but God does lend His strength to such a soul. “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness,” was His word to Paul, and Paul is not alone in such experience, for who that has kept in prayerful touch with God has not been able to look back upon some time of special need and know that heaven’s grace was given to preserve and keep the soul.

The affections are purified; the mind is quickened; the will is energized and the whole man made strong. God makes Himself over to us, so to speak; He bids us receive Himself in all His illimitable fullness, and such receiving means a life of beauty, a life of peace and a life of power. It means the heroic life, and all God’s heroes are men of prayer.

God at  
man's  
disposal.

There are some who would limit the direct efficacy of prayer to spiritual blessing. But recently such a position was taken by the occupant of a certain supposedly orthodox pulpit. Prayer for ma-

terial blessing he characterized as ignorance, cowardice and superstition. In

**Direct  
efficacy of  
prayer not  
to be limited  
to spiritual  
blessing.**

commenting on the sermon one of the leading dailies said that, "Probably no superstitious heathen idea has so long per-

sisted in the ideas and practices of Christianity as that of the direct personal response of the Supreme Being to the petitions of individuals for purely material things."

But this is not the word of Scripture. It is not the testimony of experience. The will of Almighty God rules in the material as well as in the spiritual universe, and if He has told us to pray we may be sure that somehow He has made room in His plan of government for prayer as a determining factor in the course of events.

But what intellectual short-sightedness to admit such efficacy in the spiritual realm and deny it in the material! Does not God's government extend over the mind and heart and will, and are there no laws in

**Intellectual  
short-  
sightedness.**

the spiritual world? Unless these questions are answered in the negative, and in the negative no sane man will think of answering them, it does not take very close thinking to see that whatever objection may be brought against the answering of prayer in the material world, if they be true, are equally true for the spiritual world.

Here is something good from Austin Phelps; it fits admirably just here:

“In the mind of God, we may be assured, the conception of prayer is no fiction, whatever man may think of it. It has, and God has determined that it should have, a positive and an appreciable influence in directing the course of a human life. It is, and God has proposed that it should be, a link of connection between the human mind and the divine mind, by which, through His infinite condescension, we may actually move His will.

“It is, and God has decreed that it should be, a power in the universe, as distinct, as real, as natural, as uniform, as the power of gravitation or of light or of electricity.

“A man may use it as trustingly and as soberly as he would use either of these. It is as truly the

## 78 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

dictate of good sense that a man should expect to achieve something by praying as it is that he should expect to achieve something by a telescope or the mariner's compass or the electric telegraph."

Book Three  
How Can God Answer Prayer?



# I

## GOD'S DIGNITY AND MAN'S INSIGNIFICANCE

*“What is man that thou art mindful of him?”—*  
Ps. 8: 4.

While affirming the Scripture doctrine of prayer we cannot here be unmindful that many earnest Christians are not a little embarrassed with a vagueness of belief and even skeptical suggestions as to the need of prayer and whether God can or does really answer prayer in case one prays.

Before passing to the more practical discussion of what constitutes real praying, if anything helpful can be said to one who is beset with the difficulties just mentioned, it ought to be said just here. The following few pages are not, therefore, meant in any sense as a reply to the “modern thinker” with his scientific (?) objection to prayer. It is barely possible that

even a "modern thinker" may have a little yet to learn, and after we have all gotten through down here, is it not still barely possible that some things will be made a little plainer up there? But the one thing that the "modern thinker" ought to learn first is the one thing from which he is probably farthest away, namely, that he can learn more about God and the mysteries of His government through his conscience and his heart and actual obedience to the Word of God than he ever can with all his brains when these things are forgotten.

But what we are now to say is said to relieve, if possible, and possible to a large degree it certainly is, the embarrassment of mind concerning this matter that annoys at times even the earnest Christian. You esteem highly the privilege of prayer; you feel quite sure you would rather comfort yourself with God's promise to answer prayer than anything man might say to prove the

The primer  
lesson for  
the "modern  
thinker."

Earnest  
Christians  
perplexed.

answer to prayer a reasonable thing, and yet you have found your mind at times searching after a purely rationalistic basis upon which to ground the possibility of answered prayer, and the search has landed you in something of perplexity and possibly not a little doubt. Confused somewhat after the fashion of Nicodemus in his attempt to understand the mystery of regeneration, you find yourself saying to yourself as he did to Christ, "How can these things be?"

It is not, of course, to be presumed that one must refrain from prayer until he thoroughly understand whatever mystery may surround the subject. As well refrain from wearing the <sup>Room</sup> <sub>for faith.</sub> warm garment until there are no mysteries surrounding the process by which the grass growing on the hillside is converted, after entering the sheep's stomach, into wool growing on its back. As well refrain from eating till you have learned the chemical constituents of the food of which you are about to partake.

Yet we are told to love God with our *mind* and so far as our reason will take us we are certainly privileged and obligated to go, but reason is bounded, and were we to believe nothing but what we can understand, we leave no room for faith at all and both worlds become cold and dark and cheerless. What transcends reason you may be asked to believe, but what can be shown to be contrary to reason you never will be asked to endorse.

Some of these prayer perplexities we are now going to examine.

*One of them relates to the infinite dignity and exalted character of God. How can such a Being concern Himself with the petty affairs of so insignificant a creature as I?* Is it not a piece of inexcusable presumption as well as derogatory to the character of the Almighty to suppose that

God's  
greatness  
and man's  
insignifi-  
cance.

One so glorious and so infinitely great can stoop to an interest in the concerns of man who, after all that can be said about his position among created things, is but "a

worm crawling on the surface of one of God's smallest planets”?

We reply to the one who is thus thinking, that your idea of true dignity is false and mistaken. Such dignity as you have in mind often belongs to human royalties, but is in itself beneath the true dignity of the King of kings. You have thought such condescension to be unworthy of One so exalted, whereas it is one of His brightest glories that His love and His care extends to the small and insignificant as well as the great and important. The God who paints the evening sunset is the God who touches the butterfly's wing with its gorgeous hues. The God who planned the organ harmony of the spheres is the God who fashioned with such delicate care that sweetest of musical instruments in the throat of the nightingale. He feeds the fowls, clothes the grass and arrays the lilies in their more than Solomon-like glory. Are you not as important as these?

wrong  
conception  
of dignity.

It was not beneath God's dignity to

## 86 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

create so unimportant a being as yourself. Why, then, should His glory be tarnished if He lends His thought to your wants and your necessities? Augustus Thompson has well said, "If He numbers your hairs, will He not also, your tears?"

But, after this truth is gratefully appreciated, let us be reminded in the next place that the perplexity in question arises partly from a mistaken conception of man's true place in creation. You have thought of this vast universe with its immeasurable space filled with innumerable

God's idea  
of man. worlds swinging about each other, and you have thought of

God as having something more important to do than to busy Himself with the trivial affairs of so unimportant a being as yourself. But possibly in God's estimation man is not of such infinitesimal consequence after all. Bulk is not the highest test of greatness. If it were, the question, "Of how much more value is man than a sheep?" would find its answer in the difference of avoirdupois. But if

man reads aright the Word of God he will know that he outweighs in worth ten thousand times all the sheep the world has ever held; and if he interpret aright the significance of his mental and moral endowments, if he seriously reflect upon his place and influence in the developing world of which he is a part, he will not find it hard to believe that God has crowned him with a glory and honor far above all the other forms of life about him; and unless a huge bulk of senseless matter is nobler than that which lives and feels, and unless this last be nobler than that which thinks and aspires after God, we need not feel that man is too insignificant and of too little worth to attract the attention and the care of Him whose handiwork he is. Man is God's own child; he is "Nature's sceptered king"; for his coming God had busied Himself preparing the earth through all the untold ages of the past; and unless God, who is Himself all intelligence and goodness, is more interested in things than

Manhood  
not meas-  
ured by  
inches or  
pounds.

He is in souls; unless He is more concerned about the fowls of the air than He is about the child of His own likeness, we need not feel that He is too exalted or too busy to take account and care for even you and me.

**God will  
interest  
himself in  
his own  
child.**

“I know not where His islands  
Lift their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.”

## II

### WHY PRAY IF GOD KNOWS AND IS KIND?

*“Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.”*—MATT. 6: 8.

A second perplexity shapes itself thus: Is not God all-knowing? Why, then, tell Him that with which He is already familiar? And is He not kindhearted and benevolent and therefore infinitely disposed to supply all our needs without any asking on our part? Does not, indeed, our importuning imply an unreadiness on His part to give, and is it not therefore an affront to Him?

Yes, “Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him,” but He has told us, nevertheless, to pray, and whatever His design may be it will certainly be to our interest to follow His instruction.

Again, His knowing does not exclude

the possibility of our asking being pleasing to Him. It is a sure mark of confidence in Him.

Again, not to mention the reflex benefit, for we are now thinking of the direct efficacy of prayer, to say, "Oh, well, no use to pray; if it's best to be, it will be," is utterly incompatible with the disposition that would appreciate and make the most of the favor if it came. Earnest prayer is not only the most appropriate evidence that the sinner feels his needs but the most

Moral fitness to receive evidenced by earnest desire. appropriate evidence of his moral fitness to receive the blessing that otherwise would be best for him. You may

know your neighbor is in want and be most anxious to help him, and yet he may in his present state of mind be so indifferent to his poverty as to make it quite as much worth your while to throw your help away.

### III

#### PRAYER AND THE REIGN OF LAW

*“The thing that is done upon the earth He doeth it Himself.”*

Another difficulty presents itself thus: *Are not all things controlled by law? How, then, can God interfere to bring about any change for my sake without causing confusion and disaster? How can God, in order to answer prayer, interfere with the fixed and immutable laws that reign in the universe?*

Thousands of earnest, praying Christians are troubled at this point.

Better trust God and pray on as He has told you to.

But think for a moment. What do you have in mind when you think or speak of law? What do you mean by law? You mean, do you not, a regularized The source of law. mode of action; you mean an observed order of sequence; a rule by

which the same effect always follows the same cause. But something must be responsible for all this exact regularity. What is it? Is it some self-sustained invisible force? If so, then the nature of God is impugned and the universe is robbed of its Deity.

Think but a little further and this will be plain. *Either* the self-sustained force in question is self-originating, in which case there is no Being responsible for all the universe contains, and if such be true, there is in fact no Supreme Being—no God at all; *or*, such force having originated with God has been voluntarily surrendered to itself and the creatures of this world to it, which in the last analysis resolves God into a heartless monster whose offspring are left to rail with embittered soul against the inevitable from which there is no hope or help; *or*, such force, if self-sustained, originating with God, has gotten altogether beyond His control, which means that you must divest God of the name Almighty, for He has plainly set

in motion machinery that He cannot manage. How such a view holds God up to ridicule! How much it makes Him like the fabulous inventor who prepared an automobile which, when started, would run for days and weeks; but he neglected to provide any way of stopping it, or of regulating its speed. He mounted it, but found he could not control it; he got hungry, thirsty and sleepy, but the machine carried him on until he perished.

Did God  
make an un-  
manageable  
universe?

If, on the other hand, we see in the responsible agent back of all the workings of nature God Himself, then what are these various modes of action which are so regular and so immutable and which we call Law, but expressions of God's own will? Law is the expression of God's will. It is the way God decides that force shall act upon matter. In itself it has no existence; it is simply our name for expressing God's mode of working. It is the way God does things. The only thing science can say

The true  
definition  
of law.

is, certain effects follow certain causes *because they do*: the Christian says they do *because God provides for their so doing*. In other words, “the thing that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself.”

Since this is true, where is the folly of asking God to control the forces of either the natural or spiritual world for the benefit of His trusting, praying children? “As if,” says Boyd Vincent, “God had somehow created the world like a great clock, and set it a-going, and were now afraid to touch it lest, like some meddlesome boy, He should get His fingers into the works and stop it.”

Surely God would leave room for the freedom of His will without necessarily violating the order He established. More than this, *who will dare say that God cannot, if He choose, without disaster, modify, suspend or even change what we call a law*. But to answer prayer no such heroic measures are necessary. Every result which even man produces is brought about by the combination and adjustment of

forces existent about him. Science has proven beyond a shadow of doubt that every force in the world is wholly inoperative unless certain conditions are fulfilled and that when these conditions are fulfilled that force begins to work its wonders. Shall the creature be privileged thus to utilize the forces which he found here at his coming and the like prerogative be denied the Creator who brought them into existence? Has man any good reason for believing that his will is more closely linked with these things than is the will of God?

God utilizing his own forces to answer prayer.

For instance, if man had but the means, he could make it rain whenever he wanted to. Rain is condensed vapor falling in drops to the earth. It is produced by known physical agencies, the more apparent of which are heat and air currents. Now, if man could generate sufficient heat to alter the atmospheric currents what would hinder him from bringing rain to the earth at his will? And in case he

fired some vast plain or mighty city to effect his purpose, could we say that in producing rain he had violated nature's established laws? No, he had simply used them.

Rain in answer to prayer.  
Shall we now admit that man can make it rain and God cannot? By no means, but when God, in answer to prayer, wills that it shall rain He simply provides that the natural forces over which He has control and which are productive of such result be brought into operation.

We children of lesser ability look upon some great modern scientific thinker and wonder at his prodigious learning, but he must look very small in the eyes of God, though he does not seem to know it, when he ventures the gratuitous assertion that God can not at His pleasure manipulate or control the laws He has brought into existence. As, for instance, when Tyndall says it would be as unreasonable for a shower to come from heaven in response to a human prayer as for the St. Lawrence river to roll up the falls of Niagara; when,

in fact, the one is no more unreasonable than the other. What would be required to roll the St. Lawrence up Niagara Falls? Simply a <sup>Tyndall's</sup> <sub>defiance of God.</sub> force stronger than that of gravitation and *the thing is accomplished*, and that without the violation or even the suspension of any of nature's laws. Pope in his "Essay on Man" voices the skepticism with which we are dealing, in these lines:

"Think we, like some weak prince, th' Eternal  
Cause  
Prone for His fav'rites to reverse His laws?

When the loose mountain trembles from on high,  
Shall gravitation cease if you go by?"

The only sensible answer is, *Yes, if God so choose.*

That God *would* do a thing like that is not likely, but it is perfectly absurd to say that He cannot. Man's arm is not so strong as God's, else he could put out his hand and hold the mountain back himself. In smaller matters he is doing it.

every day. By an impulse of your will you order your hand lifted up and it goes right against the same force of gravity that is pulling the mountain down. By lifting

**The forces  
of nature  
at man's  
disposition.** your hand you temporarily overmaster the force of gravity.

Every boy who catches a descending ball and every child who throws a dam across a laughing rivulet does the same. When the engineer reverses his engine and stops the onrushing train he has neither annulled nor violated any law; he simply overbalanced one mighty force by calling into play another. No violence has been done to the reign of law in any case. Everywhere in nature this overpowering of one force by another is going on.

Kinsley, in his little work on "Science and Prayer," takes for illustration a tumbler of water. Says he, "If it were not for

**Kinsley's  
tumbler  
of water.** the cohesive attraction between the particles of the glass being stronger than the gravity, the sides would crumble into dust and sink with the water to the lowest attainable

level. Gravity has not been destroyed, but simply mastered by a stronger antagonist. Remove a part of the heat from the water and it will become a crystallized solid, showing that until now the heat force had been holding the crystalline in check. Lower still further the temperature and the sides of the tumbler will burst into pieces, the crystalline force overcoming the cohesive. Raise the temperature and the water will change to steam and a repellant between the particles will appear, the heat driving them asunder, despite all that cohesion and gravitation can do."

If man by an effort of *his* will can thus exercise such power over the forces of nature, assuredly we cannot be unwilling to concede that God can do likewise. How did you lift your hand? Virtually by putting your will under it. Likewise the boy overcame the force of gravity by putting his will under the ball, and the little child by putting its will against the streamlet. And so could God if He choose put His

will under the toppling mountain, as He did put His will under the floating axe in the days of Elisha, and in precisely the same way could God by a direct effort of His will deliver any one who prays to Him

Natural law and the will of God. from the operation of any of His natural laws. Just how

God could so dispose His will is the real mystery after all, but who has ever discovered just how he gets his own will under his hand or just how a boy gets his beneath a ball? In short, the last is quite as mysterious as the first. God often works indirectly through human agencies or natural forces whose operation is visible to us, but that He should work directly or invisibly does not alter the principle involved.

Tyndall, who has so laboriously opposed the Christian faith in this respect, admitted that prayer might avail for spiritual aid, but said that no good could come “of giving it a delusive value by claiming for it a power in physical nature.” Dr. Patton has aptly remarked that, “A meta-

physical philosopher might indeed exactly reverse the statement, with much greater plausibility. He might affirm that, knowing from constant experience the power of free will over the laws of matter, and the ease with which it can overrule, or combine, or counterbalance them, to work out its own results, he was ready to concede that prayer might lead God to produce physical effects; but that the real difficulty lay in understanding how God could answer prayer by producing mental and moral changes, where He would have to deal not with dead matter but with living spirits; not with necessitated forces but with freedom itself."

Dr. Patton's  
reply to  
Tyndall.

In the presence of skeptical assaults on prayer, or the honest perplexity of one's own mind, it may be gratifying to recall the life and the attitude of some of the world's masters in matters of science. Let one example here be enough—Agassiz, a man who studied nature as few have ever done. His was no common intellect,

and yet he prayed. He knew the laws of matter as few have ever known them since, but he knew that mind was back of them all. He saw the unchangeable precision with which they ruled about him, but yet he prayed for he knew they were expressions of some master will. He is gathered with his pupils on an island shore; they have come for study and investigation. Listen as he speaks to them and then watch him as he bows his mighty mind in the presence of nature and the God from whence all nature came. Whittier has described the scene:

“Said the master to the youth:  
‘We have come in search of truth,  
Trying with uncertain key  
Door by door of mystery;  
We are searching through His laws,  
To the garment-hem of cause,  
Him, the endless, unbegun,  
The Unnameable, the One,  
Light of all our light the source  
Life of life and Force of force.

By past efforts unavailing  
Doubt and error, loss and failing,  
    Of our weakness made aware,  
On the threshold of our task  
Let us light and guidance ask,  
    Let us pause in silent prayer!"

"Then the master in his place,  
Bowed his head a little space,  
And the leaves, by soft air stirred,  
Lapse of wave and cry of bird,  
Left the solemn hush unbroken  
Of that wordless prayer unspoken,  
While its wish, on earth unsaid,  
Rose to heaven interpreted."

No, child of the kingdom, the reign of law does not make it impossible for God to answer your prayer. "It dissolves into thin air, as we look at it, this fancied barrier of inexorable law; and as the mists clear off, beyond there is the throne of the Moral King of the universe, in whose eyes material symmetry is as nothing when compared with the spiritual well-being of His moral creatures" (Liddon).

## IV

### PRAYER AND PREDESTINATION

*“Known unto Him are all His works from the beginning of the world.”*—ACTS 15:18.

There is still another difficulty. Are not all things that are going to occur pre-determined in the mind of God? And if everything has been eternally foreknown and predestinated, does not any later arrangement of events because of prayer, or for any other reason, involve God in a hopeless contradiction and reflect therefore upon His perfect character? How, then, can prayer have any influence with God in bringing to pass the things that are to take place?

This is, we admit, after all a serious perplexity. It is, in fact, the *only* serious perplexity, and it is at this point the subject passes more fully beyond the grasp of finite reason than at any other. It practically

The most  
serious  
perplexity.

brings up the old bone of contention between the advocates of God's sovereignty on the one hand and those of man's free will on the other.

Once more our advice would be, Trust God and pray on as He has told you to do. If God has told us that He will answer our prayers, He will take care of His sovereignty. Anyhow, after we have done all our reading and all our thinking upon this enigma we will be left pretty much where we are now, namely, looking along two seemingly parallel lines of thought, both of which seem to be true and yet apparently contradictory, but which, after all, must meet at some point in God's own plan of perfect wisdom far beyond the vision of any finite intelligence.

There are three explanations in each of which millions of Christians have found encouragement to pray.

Each of these explanations teach that prayer and predestination are Scriptural truths. The three explanations.

They might be distinguished as Ab-

solute Predestination, Conditional Predestination, and Limited Predestination.

The first explanation declares that everything which comes to pass is first predetermined in the mind of God. It declares that God's predestination precedes His foreknowledge as the ground of certainty for human action. God only foreknows that which He has predetermined to take place.

The second explanation, while admitting that God absolutely predetermines some things, contends that such things as respect the government of his free moral agents are only conditionally predetermined. God purposes to do under certain conditions, which depend upon the free agency of man, what He would not do under other conditions. This explanation further declares that God's foreknowledge precedes His predestination. God only predetermines that which He foreknows will take place and the foreknowledge of human action has no influ-

ence upon its taking place; it does not necessitate the action.

The third explanation denies that God's foreknowledge is necessarily all-comprehending.

We will think for a while about these explanations.

1. Suppose we accept the first one. We remark in passing that if the foreordination of events be a sufficient reason for not praying, it is an equally sufficient reason for not doing anything else. As well might one say, "If it be ordained that I shall live, it is not necessary for me to eat," as to say, "If it be ordained that I shall obtain any good, it is not necessary for me to pray for it." But it is very evident that such reasoning is a swift and sure road to the starest fatalism. If foreordination be a valid objection against praying, it is also a valid objection against every other form of human activity.

Predestina-  
tion fatal to  
all activity,  
if to prayer.

Still the question confronts us, What

use to pray if God has eternally settled all things?

In answer to this we propose another question. If God encourages us to pray, does it not seem reasonable to suppose that somehow in His eternal planning He made allowance for it? And close on the heels of this question comes another. What if God foreordained our prayers and embraced them within His

Allowance  
made for  
prayer in  
the plan  
of God.

plan as predestinated factors toward the accomplishment of His purposes in the world? What if God so arranged the succession of events as to give due place and influence to prayer in bringing them about? In other words, what if God foreordained the means as well as the end? To illustrate: Suppose that God foreordained that a certain temporal blessing should be yours as a result of some prayer, which prayer He also foreordained as the influence with Him in securing the blessing? The former, I am aware, you might call a provisional predestination, but since

it depends upon predestinated means it is, after all, as absolutely certain as it otherwise could be.

The perplexity is a stubborn one. One can easily wish for still clearer light; yet the foregoing explanation is that given by scores of the closest thinkers in every portion of the church, and so general has been the satisfaction it has given that by many it is considered as the accepted creed of Christendom. And if such explanation be accepted, then so far from God's unchangeableness being an objection to prayer, it becomes the sure ground of our confidence in prayer; for so far from it being necessary that God should change His will in order to answer prayer, it becomes absolutely necessary that His will should not be changed. Fail to answer He cannot without a reversal of His decree and a contradiction of His own perfect nature.

God's un-  
changeable-  
ness the sure  
ground of  
successful  
petition.

2. Suppose we accept the second explanation. Now if some events are pre-

destinated only upon certain conditions, which you or I as free moral agents may or may not fulfill, and if prayer be made in Scripture to be one of these conditions, then the influence which prayer has with God is plainly manifest.

But you ask, "If God foreknows everything, as this theory also admits, does He not then also foreknow that the particular prayer in question will be made, and if so, is not both the prayer and the supposed consequent event made certain from all eternity? Wherein, then, does this explanation differ from the other?" In this reply the exponents of this explanation, that while the predetermination of an event necessitates its occurrence, God only

God's fore-  
knowledge  
prior to  
his prede-  
termination.

predetermines what He foreknows is going to occur and the foreknowledge of an occurrence does not necessitate it, for the plain reason that it is mere knowledge and not influence, and so has no effect upon the freedom or certainty of the action.

This theory is best set forth in “Whe-  
don on the Will” (Part II, Sec. 3, Chap.  
11). He shows us how that God’s fore-  
knowledge is not so much “a foreknowl-  
edge of a peculiar kind of event, as a  
knowledge in Him of a peculiar quality  
existent in the free agent.” God “under-  
standeth the thoughts of man afar off.”  
He so understands the temperament and  
disposition of every one of His creatures  
as to be altogether sure of how each of  
them will act under any given circum-  
stances; and when we are told that God’s  
foreknowledge must be to some degree  
uncertain unless He has Himself prede-  
termined the action in question, the advo-  
cates of this second explanation are at  
once by our side to say, “not unless any  
person can prove that the Divine pre-  
science is unable to dart through all the  
workings of the human mind, all its com-  
parison of things in the judgment, all the  
influences of motives on the affections, all  
the hesitations and haltings of the will, to  
its final choice.”

This is the explanation which has appealed to multitudes of the world's best thinkers. Some of us are doubtless not yet altogether satisfied. Truth seems to lie on either side. But you can pray intel-

**Difficult to  
reconcile  
predestina-  
tion with  
the sovereign  
will of man.**

ligently and with assurance on the basis of either explanation. We must not forget, however, that this is an attempt of the finite to grasp the infinite, and we have no way of understanding Him "whose ways are past finding out," except through our own imperfect notions of those attributes and capacities which would seem to be necessary in us to accomplish what we ascribe unto God. But even though we may not with our limited and imperfect notions be able to reconcile God's absolute predestination or certain fore-knowledge with the sovereign will of man, we ought not therefore to lose faith in our

**Thomas  
Watson  
quoted.**

God or in His promises, for as the writer just quoted (Thomas Watson) has said, "If God has established it as one of the principles

of His moral government to accept prayer, in every case in which He has given us authority to ask, He has not, we may be assured, entangled His actual government of the world with the bonds of such an eternal predestination of particular events as either to reduce prayer to a mere form of words, or not to be able Himself, consistently with his decrees, to answer it, whenever it is encouraged by his express engagements."

3. Suppose we accept the third explanation: the explanation which affirms that God's foreknowledge and foreordination are not necessarily all-comprehending.

You shrink from an attitude of thought like that toward the Supreme Being. It appears, does it not, to reflect discredit upon His perfection? Yet, let us not be too hasty in our judgment. Many earnest and noted scholars defend the position and strenuously maintain that not only does it not dishonor God, but that it is the only scheme of thought which does not divest

Does God  
foreknow  
everything?

Him of the essential attributes of His divinity.

The position is quite clearly set forth in W. W. Kinsley's "Science and Prayer," one of the required books for the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. This explanation, if it may be maintained consistently with the perfection of God's character, relieves us, of course, of the difficulty in question.

It is contended by the advocates of this explanation, that when God created us in His own image and made us equally with Himself of sovereign will (and we know we are free to choose as we will) by His very so doing He surrendered at least partially His control over us and of necessity limited thereby His foreknowledge concerning us. Plainly it is the old time-worn controversy between two great schools of theology; between God's sovereignty on one side (involving as it does His absolute foreknowledge and predestination) and man's free will on the other, and between the

*An ancient  
controversy.*

horns of such a dilemma the only thing to do is to confess a wise ignorance and hang on to both.

A controversy of God's perfect foreknowledge does not set well with most of us, regardless of our denominational bias. The fear, however, of any belittling conception of God its advocates would overcome by showing what the theory of such foreknowledge really involves, leaving us to decide which is the greater injustice, if any, to the all-perfect character of God.

The following from the work above quoted on "Science and Prayer" will help us to an appreciation, if so be such is possible, of the position assumed by the advocates of the limited knowledge theory. The author says: "No petitioner can plead with any genuine unction unless he believes that he can actually effect some change in the purposes existing in the divine mind at the time his prayer is offered. . . . If God foreknows everything that will ever come to pass, all His own mental states must necessarily be in-

cluded in that foreknowledge. A moment's reflection will convince us that **Does God otherwise there is not a single foreknow his own mental states?** present intention or plan but what is exposed to the possibility of modification. If a single thought or emotion is ever going to spring up in God's mind unanticipated, God Himself must be as ignorant as we as to what part of His vast plan it will pertain. And so, if we would logically defend a belief in the all-comprehensiveness of God's foreknowledge, we must affirm that not a single new idea can arise in His mind—not a single new emotion be felt—and that if He is thus limited now He must have been equally so at every moment in all the eternal past, and must be through all the years to come; for if there ever has been, or ever will be, a moment when a new thought can thus come, then during all the time preceding that moment the foreknowledge was incomplete. Where does this lead? In what sort of an intellectual or emotional condition does this irrefraga-

ble logic compel us to assert God to be continually? Unquestionably that of perfect stagnation. No thought processes can be carried on under such conditions—no succession of ideas, no change of mental state; but God must have been and must still be imprisoned in a hopelessly dead calm. . . . When, then, did He form His plans for creation? Under this supposition there never could have been a time when He began to think about them. . . . If God has had no thought succession, He can have had no feeling; His emotional state having ever necessarily been that of unbroken placidity—of absolute apathy, His heart throbless as a stone. He could experience no change of feeling, for that would involve thought-succession. From all the sources of joy or sorrow of which we can conceive He would be utterly debarred — from pleasurable or painful memories, from hopes and forebodings, from social sympathies, from emotions that accompany changes, contrasts, sur-

Some  
conclusions  
seemingly  
inevitable.

prises, from the glow of activity, even from the delights and griefs of contemplation; for they all involve thought-movement. Therefore, under this supposition God can have no emotional activity, for He would have no thought-activity for its background. Thoughts must, of course, come and go, or the heart lies dead.” “Such,” he says, “are the absurdities in which we become hopelessly entangled the moment we attempt to defend the doctrine of God’s perfect foreknowledge.”

No Christian scholar would for one second espouse or teach a doctrine of which <sup>Loyalty to the character of God.</sup> he has the least suspicion that it is in any sense derogatory to God. For the writer it is impossible to conceive of God’s all-comprehending foreknowledge and absolute predestination without including His mental states, for blindly and irrationally He certainly does not act, and because this is true, the conclusions of the above author, some seem to think, are well nigh irresistible.

Again, some things are to be appreciated and not defined. For instance, such a thing is Power. Who can tell you what power is, though definition be piled up mountain high? Power is to be appreciated and the simplest child can do it. On the other hand, some things are to be defined and not appreciated. Such a thing is predestination; such is omniscience. These things are easy to define; the very words speak out their own meaning, but who can appreciate them? Who can understand how God can be everywhere at once? or that His mind can reach at the same time every speck of matter in the vast universe, absolutely determining the motion of every dust particle, the juxtaposition of every infinitesimal molecule and its relative position with every other atom in the world, the exact time, direction and rapidity of action of the world's every mote of moving protoplasm? Yet to just such an extreme and even farther

Things hard and easy to define.

The logic of predestination.

does predestination take us when followed absolutely to the conclusion towards which it points.

That such must necessarily be predicated of a Being before He can be worthily thought of as God we have sometimes found ourselves wondering. Could He not quite as well have committed these things to the care of chemical and vital forces the invariable operation of which He has secured by laws which are under His control? Now if, while God prearranged such forces as well as the forces that give us the sustained harmony of the universe and surround us with such provi-

The action  
of the  
human  
will in  
uncertainty. dences as meet our probable wants, He could leave the action of the human will in uncertainty by delegating to man through all the coming ages the power of free and unhindered choice, and at the same time leave nature with her governing laws in such responsive condition that, having all matter and all force obedient to His bidding, He can, in response to the

petition of His confiding child; alter what without such petition would have been otherwise; we have found ourselves wondering if such a view is not, in comparison with that of absolute predestination, equally honoring to God and quite as stimulating to man. To many it seems far more so.

It is not necessary to know which of the three views are seen to be right from the eternal sighting place. Some time we will know what now we do not or cannot know. But if any child of His, who is troubled with the question we have been considering should read these pages, there is one thing we hope he will not fail to see, that whether he prefer the one or the other of the explanations which divide the Christian thought of the world, they are all of them encouragements to prayer, and one can pray trustingly and confidently, whether he think one way or the other.

We may be sure that if God has told us to pray and that He would answer, that He will make arrangements for that an-

Either ex-  
planation an  
encourage-  
ment to  
pray.

swer, whatever be the difficulties that appear to our little minds to stand in His way. Let us be grateful that it is so, and let us honor Him with a large faith as we take hold of His exceeding great and precious promise to hear us and answer when we pray.

Book Four  
How to Pray



# I

## PRAYER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“I will pour upon the house of David the Spirit of grace and of supplication.”*—ZECH. 12: 10.

*“Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”*—GAL. 4: 6.

*“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”*—EPH. 2: 18.

*“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”*—ROM. 8: 26, 27.

*“With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit.”*—EPH. 6: 18.

*“Praying in the Holy Spirit.”*—JUDE 20.

No one can read the above passages without seeing at once that the Holy Spirit bears a very intimate relation to the prayers of a Christian. All spiritual experience finds its source in the indwelling

Spirit of God, and as prayer plays so important a part in such experience, the fact just stated ought to occasion no surprise. It is Andrew Murray who says, "The mystery of prayer is the mystery of the divine indwelling," and John Owen, who has remarked "that it cannot be denied that the assistance which the Holy Spirit gives in our prayers and supplications is more frequently and expressly asserted in the Scripture than any other operation of His whatsoever," and many a one has confessed his agreeable surprise in discovering, on going through the Word, how much real prayer is one of "the things of the Spirit," and has lent glad testimony that prayer becomes immeasurably sweeter, an altogether new experience, when the soul is properly under His control in this most holy exercise. Let us therefore

The subject  
not without  
mystery. endeavor to see something of the Spirit's place in prayer. Everything may not be altogether clear to our limited vision, but if

our study help us to appreciate Him a little more, it will be time well spent. Just *how* "the Spirit helpeth our infirmity"; just the way in which He "intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be uttered," we may not know; but to know that He does; what an encouragement to "come boldly to the throne of grace." Our "praying in the Holy Spirit" may not be without its mystery, but that we may so pray, and so pray acceptably; what an encouragement to take our place in the school of prayer that the Spirit Himself may teach us *how to pray*.

If you will turn first to the Old Testament you will find that one of the distinct purposes of the Holy Spirit's coming was that He might have <sup>The Old Testament promise.</sup> a part in the prayer life of God's children. The passage is Zechariah 2:10, "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication." Supplication is not needed for any member of the Godhead, and the Spirit's work in this

respect must therefore be for us, and what is promised here to the weakest saint in the outgoing of his soul to God is the co-operation of the all-knowing, all-powerful Spirit of God Himself.

If you will now turn to the appointed time for the fulfilling of Old Testament promise, you will read in Galatians 4:6, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth <sup>The New</sup> <sup>Testament</sup> <sup>fulfillment.</sup> the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Here we find God doing exactly what He promised to do; sending the blessed Holy Spirit, and sending Him as a Spirit of prayer, enabling us to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Notice in passing, please, that this Spirit is called the Spirit of His Son. Because we have the Spirit of His Son we are Sons. Now read 1 John 3:1, and think of all this means! It is rich with blessing for those who understand. It is through the Son that “we have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). We can “come boldly to the throne of grace” be-

cause our Father sits upon it. It is the Spirit of Sonship that distinguishes prayer from beggary. "When the evidence of sonship grows dim we knock feebly at mercy's door."

But this is not all the Word says about the Holy Spirit in prayer. We read in Romans 8:26, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not what we should pray for as we <sup>The Spirit's</sup> <sup>intercession.</sup> ought, but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

The word "infirmity," while referring to our human weakness in general, has its special reference here to our weakness in prayer. The word "helpeth" is a queer compound in the original, composed of three different words, and literally means, "to lay hold of in connection with." It is the same word Martha used when she told the Master to bid Mary help her in the work she was doing. How precious this truth! What if the new birth does not wholly relieve us of all infirmity? Have

we not One ever with us whose strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12: 9)?

And when "we know not what to pray for as we ought," how does He help us? It is said that "He maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." The word "intercession" is the same word used of Christ in 1 John 2: 1, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with

The  
Christian  
has two  
advocates.the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." We have, therefore, two advocates continually

pleading our cause before the throne of grace. Christ's intercession takes place in heaven; the Holy Spirit's takes place on earth in the believer's heart. Christ pleads at the throne of glory for His redeemed that He may obtain for them the benefit of His sacrifice; the Holy Spirit pleads at the throne of grace for all the deep and hidden needs of the soul.

As to the precise character of the Spirit's intercession for us, we find ourselves in the realm of that which, to a certain degree

must remain unintelligible. The verse is a mine of truth, and if you would discover all of its hidden treasure, you must dig deep down. There are two interpretations, and since what we are writing is designed as a help in the study of this so very important subject, we shall here endeavor to set them forth in such way as to help you to a conclusion of your own, reserving, of course, the same privilege for ourselves.

One of these interpretations has been developed recently and at length in Kuyper's somewhat overloaded work on the Holy Spirit ("The Work of the Holy Spirit," page 636). Dr. Kuyper's explanation of Rom. 8:26.

This interpretation, which has remained for Dr. Kuyper to elaborate in such detail, is very ingenious, and withal so attractive that we have found ourselves almost wishing that the Scripture in question had made it a little clearer that such is really its meaning; for Dr. Kuyper's explanation is by no means an unsubstantiated one, though much he has

written in connection with it is gathered by inference rather than from the Word of God.

In a word, Kuyper argues that the intercession of the Holy Spirit is altogether independent of our spirit, and that the unutterable groanings in our heart are His, the Holy Spirit's, and not those which we, incited by the Spirit, heave forth.

His reasons for this view are as follows:

1. Since the groanings of verse 23 properly belong to us, the "likewise" of verse 26 must "introduce a new thing," and the groanings therefore are not ours as in verse 23, but the Spirit's.

2. The word "intercession" is the same as used in verse 34, and since Christ's intercession is wholly His own, why is the same not true of the Spirit?

3. One of the prepositions (*anti*) in the word "helpeth" confirms this explanation. The word "helpeth" is made up of two prepositions and a verb. The word is "sunantilambano"; sun (with), anti (over

against, or in place of), and lambano (to take hold).

4. Verse 27 says that God knoweth the mind, not of the man, but of the Spirit who maketh intercession.

5. The intercession is made “according to the will of God,” and this can be said of the Holy Spirit alone.

With this explanation thus confirmed in his mind, Kuyper deducts from it a most pleasing view of the Spirit’s work in prayer. Such independent intercession of the Spirit in our behalf takes place because of our infirmity. If we were brought at once by regeneration into the condition of perfect holiness, such intercession of the Spirit for the saint would not be necessary, for the saint then being himself all that he ought to be could pray as he ought to pray. Such unutterable groanings of the Spirit in the Christian’s behalf are therefore to be thought of as taking place in proportion as the Christian fails to properly pray for himself. Such we are to be

The Spirit's  
intercession  
regulated  
by our  
infirmity.

lieve to be especially the case in the heart of the young Christian, because in his early Christian experience, being yet a babe in the new life, he knows neither how nor what to pray for as he ought. Such, Kuyper would have us believe, is true of "the child regenerated in the cradle and deceased before conversion was possible, and who could not pray for himself": The Holy Spirit in him, therefore, prays for him with groanings that cannot be uttered. Such intercession He also makes for the indifferent disciple and the backslider and for the one who "has fallen into temporary apostasy." Thus, when the man has ceased praying altogether, the Holy Spirit's prayer within him continues and never fails.

But even while the Spirit thus prays in our behalf, He is teaching us more and more to pray correctly for ourselves, and

**Praying for us and with us.** as we advance in the art, His own intercession becoming thereby more and more superfluous, He takes up his work *in our own*

*prayers*, and cries unto God through human lips. His praying *for* us gives place more and more to His praying *with* us. While He is praying for us, He is at the same time teaching us better how to pray for ourselves, that gradually His own independent praying may become superfluous; not that it will ever in this life become wholly superfluous, for even in our most advanced state on earth we will still have our limitations, and be circumscribed somewhat by our infirmity. Nor is it meant that the Spirit teaches us to pray, that He may leave us to ourselves in proportion as His intercession becomes unnecessary, for only as we “pray in the Spirit” (Jude 20) can we really pray at all, but, comforting as the thought of His intercession for us may be, how infinitely better that our own prayer life be perfected by Him than to live in such spiritual infirmity as forces Him to cry continually to God in our behalf. We ask <sup>An inviting</sup> <sub>view.</sub> you now, whoever you may be that reads these pages, Is not this a most

inviting thought? It is rich with meaning. It flashes with beauty like a jewel in the sunlight. It is full of comfort. Just to sit and think of it means to be "lost in wonder, praise, and love." And it is not an unlikely thought. Nor is there any reason for doubting its truth. It is not unscriptural. I mean by that, there is nothing in Scripture to oppose it even if it be not explicitly taught in the verse under consideration.

Now let us see what others have said about this remarkable verse. There is another interpretation. It belongs to the expositors of the earlier period, and is the

<sup>The other interpretation.</sup> interpretation that has been usually received. It is that the groanings in question are the unutterable sighs of the human soul as it is incited and wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. Olshausen and most critical students of the past century are so emphatic in their opposition to ascribing groans to the Holy Spirit that it takes several exclamation points to express their sur-

prise that any one would ever think of doing it.

Ponder over the verse as we will, we cannot get away from the impression that in some way these groanings are to be associated with the consciousness of the individual, and when once this is admitted, it becomes, in part at least, fatal to the view which Dr. Kuyper has championed. Doubtless you have already inferred from the discussion of that view that the independent intercession of the Spirit is in Kuyper's mind something altogether apart from the believer's consciousness. In fact, he says, "We are not conscious of it."

We remark:

1. This does not necessarily follow, even though you think of these groanings as belonging wholly to the Spirit. Strange enough, Kuyper himself admits that these groanings may be through the human organs of speech (and so, of course, something, we must say, in which the believer necessarily shares), though seemingly unaware that such admission is utterly in-

compatible with the teaching for which he makes the verse responsible. This we will make clear in a moment.

2. The groanings may be attributed to the Spirit, as the author, inspirer, and finally the interpreter of them, and yet in a very certain sense be said to be our own.

In two other instances the Holy Spirit is said to be the agent of expression within us. In Matthew 10:20 it is said, "Take no thought (overanxious concern) how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given unto you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." It is here the Spirit who speaks, and yet not apart from the disciple's consciousness nor without the use of the human organs of speech, nor in such a way that it cannot be said in a very certain sense that it is, nevertheless, the disciple who speaks. This is made clearer still by other Scripture. In Galatians 4:6 it is said, "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, cry-

ing, Abba, Father," and in Romans 8:15 it is said, "But ye have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." What in one passage the Holy Spirit is said to do, in the other is predicated of ourselves as influenced and incited by the Holy Spirit.

3. The words, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought," which serve to introduce the particular help given by the Spirit, strongly intimate an effort on the believer's part.

4. The words "cannot be uttered" favor this view. They must refer to human incapacity. If the phrase, which is one word in the Greek, could be translated "unuttered," that is, mute, inaudible, it might not be altogether inadmissible to say they belong wholly to the Spirit, for such groanings might then be thought of as some fervent internal sighing of the Holy Spirit constituting a silent, inarticulate outgoing to God on the Spirit's part in our behalf.

But if, on the other hand, the transla-

tion, “unutterable,” that is, cannot be uttered or expressed in words,—if this <sup>The mean-  
ing of  
unutterable.</sup> translation be preferred, then, whether the groanings be silent or otherwise, how can we predicate of the Holy Spirit any such incapacity? Is there any thought that cannot be expressed, if only we are capable of finding the proper vehicle of expression? And in this we may fail, but certainly not the Holy Spirit.

Now that both the Authorized and Revised translation of the word is correct, and that the emphasis is to be laid not on the groanings being *unuttered*, inaudible, but on their being *unutterable*, that is, incapable of being expressed in words or distinct terms, is evident from the fact that only this can be proved by linguistic usage, and is favored by the analogy of all words of like ending with this one, and adopted by nearly all scholars, past and present.

5. There is an argument in the soul’s experience. What child of God has not been in the place of uncertainty when he

was not sure of the Father's will; in the place of a straightened soul when he could hardly find the heart to pray (2 Sam. 7: 27); or (if his experience has been in any degree what experiences say. to the place of spiritual exaltation which seemed like a foretaste of something still beyond, in all of which he felt that no distinct words could express to God the infinite good for which he longed or the blessing that would allay the distress of his heart?

Since such experience, which is actual, harmonizes with what many have always supposed to be the meaning of the Scripture in question, it cannot be unreasonable to suppose that the one finds, to some extent, its explanation in the other. And if it be true, what comfort then in moments of such uncertainty and such intensity when the only human relief is in our own unutterable sighings and groanings, just to be assured that the Holy Spirit is beneath it and back of it and in it all, and that in these outgoings of the

soul God can see the mind of the Spirit who is through them making known our hidden needs at the throne of grace.

**Kuyper's view examined.** 6. The arguments set forth by Dr. Kuyper to confirm his view are not unquestionably conclusive. See them again on page 131, for we are now to examine them.

(a) The "Likewise" simply introduces a new ground of encouragement. Our patience born of hope is the first ground, and now is introduced the Holy Spirit's help as a second. Even though we grant the word looks further on to the new groanings to be introduced, it can hardly be said to define in any way, even by contrast with verse 23, the more particular character of the groanings.

(b) The fact that the usual word for intercession is used carries little if any weight in determining this particular question, unless Dr. Kuyper can show that the view he opposes could more reasonably expect some other word.

(c) The word "helpeth," which Kuyper

argues in support of his position, favors, we are forced to feel, the very opposite. It is only used twice in the New Testament, the other passage being in Luke 10: 40, where Martha begs the assistance of Mary to help her in the work she was doing—to share with her in serving. It is used a few times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and always with this same meaning; not to do something in place of another, but to share something with another. This the preposition “sun” (with) argues. It may also be argued from the preposition “anti,” whose primary meaning is “over against,” “opposite,” and not “instead of” or “in place of,” which are secondary and derived meanings.

(d) and (e) These are Kuyper’s strongest arguments. Yet even these hardly warrant the wide distinction he has drawn in this operation between the acting of the Holy Spirit and our own.

It does not say that God knows the mind of the man, for the man has practically no mind himself in the matter; his

spirit, stirred and exalted by the Holy Spirit, has gotten beyond his understand-

**Emotions  
too intense  
for expres-  
sion.**      ing, and while he knows he wants something, just what that infinite good for which he

yearns may be he cannot tell, and under the operation of God's own blessed Spirit he comes to the place where his emotions are too big for utterance, and where he can do nothing but give himself to inexpressible groanings, and whether they be groanings vocal or sighings inaudible, God can see in them, deeper down than human thought or feeling, what is the mind of the Spirit who is the responsible agent in it all. And why? Not because He is or must be informed by the Spirit, but because the Spirit, having searched the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2: 10), has only been urging the believer on toward what God Himself has prepared. It is all "according to God," and must therefore be intelligible to Him, and in it all He discovers in all its sublime reality His own holy purpose for His praying child.

Now, with such help as we have tried to give, you must decide for yourself which explanation in your own judgment is preferable. We repeat that by our judgment we are inclined to the Referred to  
the reader's  
judgment. second, and prefer to think of these inexpressible sighings as those of the human soul under the influence and incitement of the Holy Spirit.

And now it is quite easy to see how such a view, which we accept as correct, is fatal, in part at least, to the teaching which Dr. Kuyper draws from his. And this will be seen by simply asking, Who is it that longs so unspeakably for what God may have to give? If these groanings may, *in the sense above described*, have a reference to the acting of the human soul, of what Christian is it that such reaching out after God may be affirmed? Plainly not the half-hearted and indifferent one, not the one who has “fallen into temporary apostasy,” but just the one whose prayer life has been most perfected, the one who has progressed furthest in divine

things. The more such an one drinks at the fountain, the deeper becomes his thirst. Conscious still of unsatisfied yearnings, though he may not understand just what the needed blessing is, nor exactly how to pray under the given circumstance, not knowing altogether "what to pray for as he ought," he knows full well his need is understood at the throne of grace whence comes all supply, and though carried on by the Spirit beyond the experience of the more ordinary Christian, because of his "weakness," which he may not expect to disappear entirely in this life, he finds relief only in those Spirit-wrought sighings and groanings so intense as to be unutterable, and so leaves his case in the hands of God. This is certainly true of spiritual blessing, and not unfrequently so when seeking for material good.

"This arises," says Principal Brown,  
Principal  
Brown  
quoted. "partly from the dimness of our spiritual vision in the present veiled state and the large admixture of ideas and feelings which

spring from the fleeting objects of sense that there is in the very best views and affections of our renewed natures; partly also from the necessary imperfection of all human language as a vehicle for expressing the subtle spiritual feelings of the heart. In these circumstances how can it be but that a degree of uncertainty should often surround our spiritual exercises, and that, in our nearest approaches and the fullest outpouring of our hearts to our Father in heaven, doubts should spring up within us as to the exact needs of the soul and the precise frame of mind altogether fitting and well pleasing to God in such exercise. Nor do these anxieties subside, but rather deepen with the depth and ripeness of our spiritual experience."

Consequently, instead of the Spirit's intercessory aid decreasing as we advance in spiritual life until it "gradually becomes superfluous," it is just in proportion as we thus advance that His help is most needed. The higher we climb the more

The real  
gauge for  
the Spirit's  
intercession.

we need His help to reach out after the things beyond. And thus we see that the main reference of the verse, so far as the child of God is concerned, is to one of the highest aspects of prayer in the experience of the most advanced believer, and not to prayerless, indifferent, and thoughtless Christians.

Of course, the Master at whose feet such an one has sat all the course through is the same all-sufficient Spirit of God, and the intercessory help to which we have been referring, although the chief import of this wonderful verse in Romans is but one form in which His much needed assistance is vouchsafed to us, and the perfecting of the prayer life, which Kuyper represents as increasing in proportion as the Spirit's intercession decreases, is just the course through which the Christian passes on his way to those deeper experiences in which the Spirit makes intercession for him with groanings that cannot be uttered.

And all this is what Paul meant by

“praying in the Holy Ghost.” Oh, if we did but realize vividly all that true prayer implies, and our own spiritual infirmity as we undertake to engage in prayer, I am sure

Self sufficiency fatal to prayer life.

we would as vividly realize our own utter helplessness apart from the Spirit’s gracious help; but thank God, the Holy Spirit knows our infirmity, and with divine pity He looks upon us, and lends Himself to us, and so purifying our affections, enlightening our minds, and begetting holy desires He works in us the prayer that God would have us utter.

McCheyne used to say that a great part of his time was occupied in getting his heart in tune for prayer. It does take time sometimes, and the heart never would get in tune if it were not for the Holy Spirit of God. It is He who prepares the heart for prayer; He who creates within us the desire to pray. This does not mean that we ought never to pray save as we are certain of the impulse of the Holy Spirit. We

Getting the heart ready.

“ought always to pray,” and even though the heart be out of tune, though it be dull and cold and heavy, even though we do not feel like praying, we ought to bow humbly and reverently before God, and tell Him how cold and prayerless our hearts are, and as we thus wait in silence before Him our hearts will be warmed and stirred and strangely impressed with the mind of God, and coming thus into tune with the heart of God it shall be made indeed a heart of prayer.

What a wonderful Helper He is!

But more. When you have waited, and are still uncertain, and the impulse of hope almost fails, or have reached the place where some spiritual good beyond anything we have ever known we feel must come if what we may rightly call the distress of our hearts is to be relieved, and we can do nothing but pour out our soul in fervent and unutterable sighings—when we have reached such a place; that He, the Holy Spirit, should give to these inexpressible yearnings which He Himself

caused to well up within us a language in which God reads His own best thought for His praying child—this is help in itself wonderful beyond expression. Do you remember the Holy Spirit's other name? It is *Paraclete*, "One called to our aid." Is He not exactly what His name implies He is?

## II

### THE LIFE THAT PRAYS

*“If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.”*—JOHN 15: 7.

But the last word about the Spirit's help in prayer has not been said. What has been said encourages us, but surely this does not exhaust Paul's meaning when he says, “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity”; surely this does not make up all that is contained in His thought when he tells us to do our “praying in the Holy Spirit.” If it did we might well despair of ever praying acceptably to God; for when we search the Scriptures we find that *His*

**Underlying conditions.** *promises to answer prayer all depend upon the fulfillment of certain conditions by those to whom they are made.* And these conditions, who could fulfill them if left to himself! But as the Holy Spirit is the source

of all our spiritual excellency, surely we can make no mistake if we seek through Him, and through Him solely, the ability to pray after the manner prescribed by God.

Many a child of God is complaining of unanswered prayer, and who can number the prayers that have fallen from human lips to which no response has come from Him for whose ear they were intended?

*Petitions  
without  
response.*

Yet who was it that said, "Ask and ye shall receive"? Surely there must be something wrong somewhere; we need only to remember that with God's promise to answer prayer is linked always an inseparable condition, and if prayer is not answered, then *Where the fault lies.* either God is unfaithful or we have fallen short in what is required of us to make our prayers availing, and as the first alternative is not for one second to be entertained, it becomes us to consider very carefully what are the conditions which if fulfilled place God Himself under

obligation to answer the prayers of His children.

These conditions of acceptable prayer: let us study them now. They are, of course, to some extent mutually inclusive. They might, indeed, all be gathered up in one. I have seen mention of no less than a score of them, and since it is, after all, as some one has said, "the life that prays," these as well as all other elements of Christian character may with no impropriety be called conditions of acceptable prayer. Humility and sincerity and reverence and such like must all enter into the disposition of the praying soul if God is to have respect to the offered petition. All this is very plain; there is no difficulty about it. But there are other requirements, and if we may not say they are more essential, they are indeed not only absolutely indispensable but they are the very ones which necessarily involve these which we have just mentioned and others like them.

These are the conditions which sometimes the children of God say are not easy

to fulfill. Certainly not! apart from the aid of that Divine One who "also helpeth our infirmity," but, oh, if we did but accept God's word concerning what He would have the Holy Spirit accomplish in us and then trust Him to verify His truth in these lives of ours surrendered to His purpose, how mighty we would become even in prayer because His strength will have been made perfect in our weakness.

The only  
way to  
success in  
prayer.

There are four of these conditions mentioned in Scripture.

The first all-inclusive one you will find in John 15: 7, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." We often hear it said of Martin Luther, as though it were a remarkable thing, that he could have whatever he would from God; but what more remarkable than what is here said to be possible for every child of God to have? God has no favorites in this matter, and

The first  
condition.

the conditions were alike for Luther as they are for us and all others.

"If we abide in Him and His words abide in us." His promise is one of unlimited power in prayer. But what does it mean to abide in Him and to have His words abide in us? Evidently it has to do with the life we live, for the Master who made the statement had just finished speaking of Himself as the Vine in whom

**The vine and the branches.** as branches believers are to abide. It is, after all, the life

that prays; the prayer of a *righteous man* is like music to the ear of God, and in sending back the appropriate answer God Himself takes infinite delight.

Now, it is here said that if we would have power to pray aright we must abide in Christ as the branch abides in the vine. Certainly our relationship with Christ is in a sense and in a degree mystical, but there ought to be no such mystical interpretation of any Scripture as leaves the thought to an ordinary mind utterly unintelligible. For instance, Christ said,

“Abide in Me and I in you,” and as an explanation of the meaning involved it is not unfrequent to hear reference made to a piece of iron brought to a white heat in the furnace; thus the iron is in the heat and the heat is in the iron; but to my mind, so far as concerns my relationship to Christ, such an illustration conveys no appreciable conception whatsoever. What Christ said is really not so difficult to understand. It is the branch life, said He, that gives to prayer its potency. What now does it mean for a branch to abide in a vine? It means simply that it is to be in such close touch, such living union with the vine that the life of the vine may flow unhindered through it on its fruit-bearing mission.

How the  
branch  
abides in  
the vine.

The branch is utterly dependent upon the vine for its existence; it has no life of its own; unless the sap from the vine flows into the branch, the branch must wither and be fit only to be cut away and be burned. It has no purpose of its own; it is there simply and solely to be at

the disposal of the vine in receiving sap and carrying it up into ripened fruit.

This, and precisely this, is what is meant when it is said that the believer is likewise to abide in Christ. He is to keep in such close and vital touch with Christ that there may be and will be a constant inflow of Christ's own life. It means to so

The vital and dependent touch. utterly renounce the self-life as to have no other life, spiritually speaking, save as it comes from

Him. It means to renounce all self-dependence and to so abandon ourselves to Christ that He may fill us with His thoughts, and fire us with His emotions and incite us with His purposes so that our desires are really no longer our own but His, and since His life is His Spirit the prayer we now offer is really not our own but the prayer of Christ's Spirit within us. Thus do we pray in the Spirit.

A meaning not obscured by mystery. To abide in Christ! Why, child of God, this is something possible for us all; it means simply to so love Him, to so continually think

such sweet thoughts about Him, to so trust Him and so devote ourselves to Him that our lives will be absolutely at His disposal to work out His purpose concerning us and the world about us. Is not this plain and simple? It means to be a branch and this, in short, means to live solely and exclusively for the Vine. It is the branch life that is privileged to lay claim to the unlimited *whatever* in prayer.

But Christ also said that His words must abide in us. This condition is really involved in the other; it in fact precedes the other as a means to it. I know of no other way to abide in Christ save as His words abide in me.

His words  
abiding  
in us.

Christ's words are in a most vital sense equivalent to Himself, because in His words He reveals Himself to us and through our acceptance of them He imparts Himself to us with all His power for what He wishes us to become. His *promises*, when believably accepted, bind

Christ Himself over us to bring to pass the thing He hath spoken; His *commands*, when gladly received, carry with them the guarantee of Himself with His power to make us strong to do His will.

But plainer still it will doubtless be to say that His words abide in us when we <sup>The meaning made plain.</sup> *believeingly receive them into our hearts and then feed upon them and ponder over them in deep study and then, best of all, gladly and constantly obey them in our lives.* If Christ's words abide in us we can say with the Psalmist, "Thy word have I hid in my heart," and like him we will find in them our chief delight, and not only will we "meditate therein day and night," but our whole life will be one continued exposition of that for which they stand.

Thus again it becomes plain that *it is the life that prays.* The prayer which James says "availeth much" is the prayer of a righteous man. Therefore is it that we read in John, "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His

commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21, 22). If Jesus could say, "I know that Thou hearest me always," <sup>Right living again emphasized.</sup> it was because the Father could say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." When God is pleased with the life, when we so abide in Him and His words so abide in us as to make our life what it ought to be, we can begin to pray with an assurance of being heard and God will give us what we ask.

A feeble prayer always points to a feeble life. If prayer is not effective, it is evident from the condition set forth in the parable of the vine that the life must be defective. To live aright is to pray aright.

How plain it is that this is the all-inclusive condition, and how evident the need of the Holy Spirit before we can even begin to fulfill it. Look at it as we will, it all depends upon Him. Is my life to be an abiding one? How can it be except the Holy Spirit, the sap of the Heavenly Vine, flow richly into it to sustain it and make

it healthy and vigorous. Are His words to abide in me? How can they except the   
**Abiding impossible without the Spirit's aid.** Holy Spirit apply them to my heart and work them out in my life? Apart from Him Paul tells us we can neither know the things of God nor do the things that are pleasing to God. To pray with these conditions fulfilled is to "pray in the Spirit." If I am abiding in the Vine, the constant inflow of the Spirit, which is the life of the Vine, brings into my spiritual being the very desires and purposes of the Spirit, and so the prayer that is formed is not so much my own, though I make it so, as it is the Holy Spirit's, and so God is safe in His promise of the unlimited *whatsoever*.

If Christ's words are abiding in me, it is because they have been the instrument through which the Holy Spirit has worked in me the mind of Christ. The Word is indeed the sword of the Spirit, and as we ponder carefully the words given to us of God, trusting the Spirit to enlighten the

mind as we study, the prayer that has been possibly long in our heart will begin to shape itself anew under the direction of the Spirit. Thus the Spirit is the real author of the prayer, and we can trust God to give us *whatsoever we ask*, because we are thus kept from *asking amiss*. How evident it becomes that to neglect the Word is to rob oneself of the sweet privilege of praying in the Spirit, which in short is to be denied the privilege of praying at all. Disciple of Christ, are you abiding in Him? Is His word abiding in you?

### III

#### PRAYING IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

*“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.”*—JOHN 14: 13.

A second condition of prayer Jesus sets forth in the Scripture quoted above. Prayer, in order to prevail, must be made in the name of Christ. No less than six times in close succession (John 14: 13, 14; 15: 16; 16: 23, 24, 26) He mentions it *“in my name,”* as though the disciples were slow to understand and He longed to have them know, and we as well, the all-prevailing power His name contained to secure the favor of God.

But what does it mean to pray in the name of Christ?

To pray in the name of Christ means, no doubt, that we go to God *in His name* The second condition. *and not in our own.* What is a name? It is a designation which calls to our mind the person

bearing it; it sums up the knowledge we possess of a being and stands for what he is and has done. This is at least the meaning Scripture has given to the term. Thus, when Jesus says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (John 17: 6), He meant that He had manifested to them all that God is in Himself and in His relations; the full divine character. Thus, to believe "in the name of the only begotten Son of God" means to believe in the person of Christ in all that He is and has done and lives to do. The name stands for all that goes to make up a personality.

The  
meaning of  
a name.

Now, to do anything in the name of another is to do it as his representative and with the authority and power which belongs to him in virtue of who and what he is. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said, "I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him will ye receive" (John 5: 43). This is what he

meant when He said, "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me" (John 10:25). When, therefore, we are privileged to pray in the Name of Christ, the most evident meaning is that we have been granted permission to use that Name as the ground upon which to urge our plea before God. And why is the Name of

Christ's  
name the  
ground of  
our petition.

Christ of any value in securing for us the favor of God? Because the Name stands for the One whose it is, for His glorious person, His atoning work and His ever-continuing intercession, and God will have respect to our petition for the sake of such a One if we truly come in His Name.

When I use another's name I practically discard my own name as being of no value in securing what I want; and why? Because my name stands for me, and what is there in me to put the Almighty under obligation to send down His favors from on high? To go to God in my own name is to go as did the Pharisee. Five times in

his few short sentences he used the pronoun "I" to tell God who he was and what he had done. After all, he was only out on parade. He really went up to the temple to brag and not to pray; he <sup>The  
Pharisee  
on dress  
parade:</sup> asked for nothing, and got what he asked for. But when the publican prayed he prayed as every sinner ought to pray; with a becoming sense of his own worthlessness he plead the atoning merits of his Christ. To pray in the Name of Christ is primarily to plead favor on the ground of Christ's merits and none other.

Mr. Torrey has made this part of the subject plain by the use of a very simple illustration. He says, "If I go to a bank and hand in a check with my name signed to it I ask of that bank *in my own name*. If I have money deposited in that bank the check will be cashed; if not, it will not be. If, however, I go to a bank with somebody's else name signed to the check I am asking *in his name*, and it does not matter whether I have money in that bank or

any other, if the person whose name is signed to the check has money there, the check will be cashed. So it is when I go to the bank of heaven, when I go to God in prayer.

**How bank checks are honored.**

I have nothing deposited there, I have absolutely no credit there, and if I go in my own name I will get absolutely nothing; but Jesus Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and He has granted me the privilege of going to the bank with His name on my checks, and when I thus go, my prayers will be honored to any extent."

Sweet privilege! Praying in the Name of Christ. It was "by Christ Jesus," Paul said, that "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory."

But there is something more to praying in the name of Christ than this. The free

**An additional meaning to the phrase.** use of another's name certainly implies some intimate relationship between the one who gives his name and the one who is privileged to act in it.

The only question which has divided

opinion is whether such an idea actually resides in the phrase itself, "in my Name," or whether it is an idea to be gathered from what genuine prayer in that Name involves. Critical scholarship seems to preponderate in favor of the first opinion, and hence would have us believe that to pray in the Name of Christ means at once to pray in His Spirit, with His mind and in His nature. (Tholuck, Lange, Olshausen, Alford, Stier, Jukes, Murray.) If this be true it appears at once to be not unlike the condition we previously discussed where we saw that to pray with power was the privilege only of him who was abiding in Christ and had Christ's Spirit and Christ's Mind abiding in him. That this view is not without argument in its favor is evident from what we saw to be expressed in a name. What a profound thing this makes praying in the Name of Christ to be!

His name  
synonymous  
with His  
spirit.

But in spite of all that one can say, it is not easy to depart from the old conception

of praying on the basis of the Saviour's merits, and since this conception so plainly inheres in the phrase and since pleading in prayer the Name of Christ as the meritorious cause of our acceptance necessarily implies all this other view maintains, which, vice versa, would not be true, it seems best to adhere to the odd interpretation and to bring in this other idea as its natural consequence.

Thus we see that praying in the Name of Christ is not so easy an achievement as

what God takes into account. some may be inclined to think.

As Henry Clay Trumbull has said, "It is not our saying, but our showing, that what we ask is in the Name of Jesus, that God notes and takes into account." It is the place which the Name has in my life that determines the power it is to have in my prayer.

It is a mighty privilege—to pray in the Name of Christ. It behooves us, therefore, to think for a while what is implied in the use of that phrase and who has a right to use it. We recall how certain

unworthy characters “took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth,” and the evil spirit thus adjured answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” and the occasion resulted disastrously for those who unworthily and fraudulently sought to make use of that great and blessed Name.

We have already remarked that the use of one person’s name by another implies some intimate relationship between them. It, in fact, supposes a community of interests. Would you be willing to grant me the unqualified use of your name to use it when and for whatever purpose I chose, unless you felt that your honor and your interests were as safe with me as with yourself? And think you the Lord of heaven could trust His all-powerful Name with any one out of harmony with His Spirit or in whose hands the interests of His kingdom would not be secure?

The determining right to use another’s name:

The use of another's name supposes the surrender of my individual interests to his interests or to such interests as are common to us both by virtue of the union existing between us. When an officer collects money in the name of the government it is not to fill his own purse, but for the government's sake; when he makes an arrest in the name of the state it is not for personal spite, but in the interest of the commonwealth.

Andrew Murray, in his splendid volume, "The School of Prayer," shows the *Andrew Murray's "Three-fold Relationship."* right to use another's name in virtue of a <sup>threshold</sup> union. It will be helpful just here.

1. A legal union. When a merchant, before going on an extended vacation, gives to his partner or even to his clerk the power of attorney to use his name in the transaction of business, involving the right to draw upon it for thousands of dollars when necessary, it is understood that that name be used only in the interests of the business, and it is because he can trust

this second party to be faithful to the interests involved that he puts his name and his property at his command.

2. A life union. A son bears his father's name because he has his life, and his father's friends will honor and help him when he comes to them in his name, if he be found with his father's character and not seeking anything destructive to his father's interests.

3. A union of love. The bride gives up her name to wear that of the bridegroom. So he, having chosen her for himself, gives to her his name and counts on her to use it only for his interests, for being now one his interests are hers as well.

All this is true of us in using the name of Christ.

1. Having gone back to heaven Christ has committed to us the interests of His kingdom, with full power of attorney, so to speak, to use His Name in drawing supplies for the advancement of His business and in so far as our lives are yielded

The  
illustration  
applied to  
prayer.

to the interests of the kingdom (and these interests are always ours if we only knew it), so far may we plead His Name trustingly and confidently, for it will set open for us the very treasure house of heaven.

2. Christ and the believer are one; having His life we bear His Name and in proportion as we have His character and are in harmony with His Spirit we may expect to prevail with God in the use of His Name.

3. Being united in a love-union with the Heavenly Bridegroom, His interests have become mine, and in so far as I give myself to living in my new Name does that Name become the all-prevailing plea in which I may ask and receive whatsoever I will.

Thus we see, after all, what depths of meaning there is to praying in the *Name of Christ*. It is no mere saying, “For Jesus’ sake,” as though that were some magic formula but it is to pray in union with the life and mind of Christ. If He has

Christ's  
name no  
magic  
formula.

bid me pray in His Name it must be a prayer which He can endorse.

Such a prayer I cannot make save as the Holy Spirit teach me the art. He must keep my heart fixed on Jesus whose atoning merit is the only open way to God. He must reveal to me the full meaning of the name of Jesus and help me to make it supreme in my life, for if my life has anything to do with my prayer how can my prayer fulfill the condition of power save as my life is open to the influence of Him who alone can make it what it ought to be. Oh, Christian, take it to heart: You cannot pray aright without the Holy Spirit. "Hitherto," said Jesus, "ye have asked nothing in my name. *In that day* ye shall ask in my Name." In what day? In the day when He Himself came back in the Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer's heart, and "in that day," which is this day, when the Holy Spirit, who came to "teach us all things," is given the supreme control in

Prayer in  
Christ's  
name  
impossible  
apart from  
the aid  
of the Holy  
Spirit.

our lives we will be able to go to the Father in the name of Him whom we represent and say, "Father, this is His wish for me," and when the Father discovers in the tones of our voice and the throbings of our hearts our love and likeness to His Son, for the sake of that dear Son whatsoever we ask He will do it. Oh, let us lay hold of this precious truth.

It is said that when Queen Elizabeth was in power in England that she gave to her friend and lover, the Earl of Essex, a ring set with a most precious stone, and told him that in case he ever came into any

The ring set with a costly stone. place of need or personal trouble, if he would send to her the

ring he should have her help and her deliverance, no matter what the circumstance might be that brought him into unpleasant straights. Some years after it so came to pass that the Earl fell into the displeasure of the authorities. He had likewise become estranged from the queen, and the outcome of it was that he was condemned to the block. He sent up

the all-powerful ring to the queen, but no help came from the throne and the man was beheaded. But all the while the queen had waited patiently for the ring, and it was discovered after the execution that through the intervention of an enemy it was hidden from her. Such a ring God has given us, set with a Name that is sweeter and more costly than any diamond or precious stone. Let us send it up for, blessed be God, He will not disown it nor can any power in heaven or earth or hell keep it from Him.

## IV

### PRAYING ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

*“And this is the confidence we have in Him that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us, and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desired of Him.”—1 JOHN 5: 14, 15.*

Here is the third condition of successful prayer—prayer according to the will of God. That there ought to be some limitation to the right of petition;

The third condition. that there ought to be some limit within which a child can reasonably expect his Father to grant what he asks for, no right reasoning individual can for a single moment doubt, and at the fact that there is such a limitation mentioned in Scripture he cannot therefore be surprised.

If we desire to know the testimony of the Word upon any subject, it is evident

that we must take its teaching upon that subject in its entirety. It could not be expected either of Christ in His teaching or of the Apostles in their writing that they set forth the whole doctrine of prayer on every occasion where reference to it seemed appropriate. The Bible is full of theology, but it is not systematized, and if you want its teaching on any subject, you must compare Scripture with Scripture to get it.

Safe conclusions call for a comparative study of Scripture.

For instance, while we read in one place that repentance is necessary to salvation, we must not forget that elsewhere in the Word salvation is made to depend on other conditions as well. It is so with prayer, and just here is where so many make their mistake. They will read, for instance, the Master's words in Mark 11:24, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them," and argue at once that anything they may feel they'd like to have, they may ask and receive if

only they believe as they pray that it will come to pass. But I think we'll come to see very soon that this all depends upon the kind of faith we have, and this in turn depends a good deal upon the character of the request we make of God.

**The danger  
of empha-  
sizing one  
Scripture to  
the exclu-  
sion of  
another.**

Suppose for a moment it were true that God gives His people every thing they ask so long as they make themselves think He will do it? To where would this lead?

1. It would simply keep God busy running this universe according to the whims of His shortsighted children on earth. No

**Asking God  
to abdicate  
His throne.** matter what His plans for the general good and His own glory

God must practically step down from His throne and permit man to become the ruler in His stead.

2. It would involve us and those for whom we pray in untold ruin. What does Ecclesiastes 6:12 say? "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" You will remember that Jesus said to a

very ambitious woman in Matthew 20: 22, "Ye know not what ye ask." How often that is true. What was it we read in Romans 8: 26? "We know not how to pray as we ought." Some poet has said:

'We, ignorant of ourselves, often beg our own  
harm,  
Which the wise powers for our good deny.  
And so we find profit in the losing of our  
prayers.'

How glad we ought to be that this is so. Here is a father who has in his hand a bottle of aconite, and his little boy, for whom bottles have a peculiar fascination, pleads with him earnestly to give it to him. And so we often go to God for things which if granted would prove quite as injurious to us as the deadly drug would have been to the child had the father thoughtlessly granted the little one his request.

Begging God  
for our own  
injury.

3. Such a conception of prayer is self-contradictory. It makes it utterly impossible for God at times to answer prayer

at all. Suppose two opposing petitions should go up to God, as they did from the South and the North during the Rebellion?

**Making it impossible for God to answer.** What is God to do? Suppose one man desires rain for the benefit of his particular crop; another man living in the same community is raising such things as at that particular time are in need of dry weather, and he sends up his petition accordingly? Do you think any statement in this Word when rightly interpreted could land God in any such embarrassment as the theory of prayer now in question necessarily involves?

4. Such a conception of prayer would be destructive of Christian character. Have you ever heard of children being spoiled by their parents giving them everything they wanted? If you will

**The spoiled children of carelessly indulgent parents.**

think a moment you will see that possibly something not very different from that might be true of us were the heavenly Father as carelessly indulgent in this

respect as are some of the fathers of this earth.

5. And, lastly, such a theory does not stand the test of experience. Here a circle of friends pray with all faith as best they can, but the woman whose health they have desired does not survive. Here is a nation praying for the life of its wounded president, but the president does not live.

But, some one asks, Is not the promise in Mark 11: 24 an unqualified one? Yes, we answer, but within the limits that are well understood to exist between the two contracting parties. Here is a man with a well-defined plan for a house. He turns the work over to the contractor with a promise to supply whatever he might want. Very soon there comes a request for an extra supply of material to erect a few towers which in the opinion of the contractor would very much beautify the building. Here is a father who has a plan for his boy's future. He sends him to college, saying, "Send to

Experience  
fatal to  
the theory.

The incon-  
sistency  
illustrated.

me for whatever you want and you shall receive it." In a few months the boy sends home for an extra supply of cash for certain side issues of questionable propriety. Each of these requests are properly denied. "But," says each of the petitioners, "was not the promise unqualified?" "Yes," comes the reply, "unqualified within the limits which the very circumstance of the promise made evident as existing between us."

So God has a plan for the universe looking toward the advancement of His kingdom, and doubtless a plan for the life of each of His children, and any promise He might make must be construed in har-

**Prayer in  
harmony  
with the  
will of God.**

mony with the well-understood limitation as necessarily implied in the existing relations between Him and ourselves. And what is that limitation? It is that our petition be not contrary to His own all-wise and benevolent will. This is exactly what He has told us. "And this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything

according to His will, He heareth us, and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petition we desired of Him."

Prayer according to the will of God. So Jesus prayed. Listen, as He prays in the Garden, "Thy will, O God, and not mine, be done." But did you ever notice that Jesus in that remarkable prayer for those whom God had given Him, the high-priestly prayer of John 17, using exactly the same word in the original, says, "I will," but here in the Garden it is "not as I will." There must be a difference, and I think it is just this difference that will reveal to us the right rule for prayer. Had Jesus been absolutely certain that the cup could not pass away, assuredly He would not have made the petition. This we must concede if the petition is to have any real meaning at all so far as Jesus is concerned. We are, of course, face to face in Gethsemane with the deep mystery of his two natures. It is evident, however,

The way  
Jesus  
prayed in  
Gethsemane.

that He was acquainted with the Father's plan in which He was even then taking such an agonizing part. But it is equally evident that He was not altogether certain of what the Father under the circumstances might think necessary or best to do concerning the desire which He three times expressed with his agonizing, "if it be possible." This appeal was not the blind outcry of a despairing soul.

But, on the other hand, when Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us as recorded by John, His Father's thought concerning the matter was as clear in the mind of Jesus as it was in the mind of God and certain that what He prayed for was for His Father's glory, He makes known His desire in terms of His own will be-

The deciding element in different kinds of petition.

cause He knew His will to be in harmony with the will of God. And just here is the secret of prayer. In some things we may not know the Father's mind; we may not know the Father's will, and for these we only pray acceptably when we add the

“nevertheless” of Gethsemane, as Jesus did. But in other matters we may know His will, and when we do, we too can pray as Jesus prayed and say, “I will,” because we know our wills to be in harmony with His and we have simply to count the answer sure and thank Him for it.

But, you say, this is rather a bold attitude to take in prayer. But what did John say? “This is the confidence,” and that word “confidence” really means “boldness,” that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us, and in His hearing is involved His answering. John’s Epistle tells us so.

But just here is the difficulty. So many complain they do not know when their desires are in harmony with the will of God, and so cannot pray with any appreciable degree of assurance. But if any portion of God’s will has ever been or ever is revealed the fault must be with us if we do not find it out. If we did but give serious attention to what He has said and did but

How may  
I know the  
will of God:

allow ourselves to be kept in condition to understand when He speaks we might not always be without the knowledge we would like so much to have.

How, then, may I know the will of God?

1. I may know it through the Word of God. The Word is full of general promises which we have only to apply to the particular circumstance of our own life in order to ask within the limits of the revealed will of God. Such are the general promises of deliverance and protection and provision, and if the special favor we crave be so covered by the Word, what better guarantee of its bestowal could we reasonably expect?

But, to be a little more specific: Read 1 Cor. 10:13, "There hath no temptation

The will of God revealed in the Word of God. taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted

above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it." Here it is plainly revealed that it is His

will that we should not yield to temptation and a promise is given of grace sufficient to overcome. In such an hour, therefore, when we pray for strength what need have we to say, "If it be 'Thy will'?" Read James 1:5, "But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." In any emergency, therefore, we may virtually make our prayer for wisdom an expression of our own will because that will we know is the will of God. Read 1 John 5:16, "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life." Here is a promise; and who would think of praying, "Oh, God, save my child; nevertheless, if it be Thy will that he be lost forever in hell, Thy will, O God, and not mine, be done." The very thought of such a prayer is repulsive; it would be a slander <sup>Prayer for  
the unsaved.</sup> against God and is utterly inconceivable from the pages of God's Word. Where is it said that "the Lord is

not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"! and so far as God is concerned, when you pray for the salvation of an unsaved soul you may and you ought to throw your "ifs" to the wind. Other promises might be quoted. He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He has bidden us "be filled with the Spirit," and to pray for such blessings with an "if" in our petition is to distrust God and to dishonor Him. It is not always submission but absolute, unwavering expectation that honors God when we pray.

On the other hand, so far as the testimony of God's Word goes, it has not been revealed that it is best for us or our dear ones to remain in unimpaired health or to be spared from death, and therefore, unless there be some revelation above and beyond the Word, we only pray acceptably for such favors when we say, "Thy will, O God, not mine, be done." Not knowing what is best, it is our duty to leave it to

Prayer for  
the sick.

Him to give or to withhold as He sees best, knowing, as we do, that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord.

2. Again, we may often discern the will of God by the indications of divine providence. Jesus told the Jews that they might have known the will of God had they studied as studiously the signs of the times as they did the signs of the weather. Oftentimes, when in perplexity over some contemplated undertaking, the spiritually minded one needs but closely observe the providential arrangement of circumstances and occurrence of events in order to become reasonably sure of the Father's mind concerning the matter in question. This is what the Quakers mean when they talk about "the way opening." If events seem to be so arranging themselves as to "open the way" for the answer to come, it is but a sign they declare that the leading is of God and faith ought to grow strong. Those who have read the history of the

The will  
of God  
revealed  
through  
providence.

founding of George Muller's orphanages will understand what is meant by what has just been said. Some helpful instruction concerning this important matter is found in the little leaflet, "How I Ascertain the Will of God," written by this same giant in prayer who prayed so much wealth and such a marvelous work into existence.

3. And now, once more and lastly, we are brought to the knowledge of God's will by the help of the Holy Spirit. We saw in our study of Romans 8:26, that

**The will of God and the Holy Spirit.** taught, it was made plain that

the Holy Spirit prays with us and through us and draws out our prayers in the line of God's will. "We know not what to pray for as we ought," but "The Spirit helpeth our infirmity." In some way the work of the Holy Spirit has to do with the human mind. His influence is on the understanding as well as on the heart. "The Paraclete," said Jesus, "shall teach you all things and bring all things

to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

It has been the experience and testimony of more than one of God's saints that he has found himself strangely and strongly drawn out to desire some certain thing, and that when he was certain within himself that his own will in the matter had been put away, he felt deep within his soul a strong and increasingly stronger conviction that the blessing in question was God's desire for him. It is Macgregor who says, "If we are under the Spirit's control, obedient to His voice and attentive to hear it, He will whisper to us what our Father's purpose for us is, and lead us to pray for things which are according to His will." And so the Spirit makes known the mind of God; and what other ought one to do under such circumstances than to honor the Spirit by asking with boldness according to the promise given to us in the Epistle of John?

It is here, however, that a word of caution is needed. Some are indeed of the

opinion that it is “through the Word and the Word alone” that the Spirit leads to a

Near the border line of danger. knowledge of the Father’s will.

While we know that *His leading is never away from the Word*,

we are not prepared to assert that it is in no instance independent of it, only we call attention most emphatically to the need of being ruled by a wise caution lest depending wholly upon the “inward light” we be led by human fancy and one’s own feeling, and not by the authority of God. While the Holy Spirit is the great Teacher, the Bible is the great lesson book, and we do not hesitate to affirm that His usual method of “guiding us into all truth” is by applying the Word of God to our hearts, and no sort of supposed personal inspiration can ever warrant us in neglecting the written Word if we would know which way God would have us go and what things He would have us ask or do.

The Word and the Spirit—to deliberately separate them often, if not always, leads to error and fanaticism. The Spirit

without the Word—what false mysticism, what folly and sin have in the past been traceable to the theology, unworthy of the name as it is, advocating their divorce. On the other hand, the Word without the Spirit—to thus study it alone by the light of our own mental tapers is to be rewarded only by cold and barren conclusions full of false rationalism and untruth. But what a light is the Spirit on the Word ! Even the promises which are so plainly written and which all may read and study can only be revealed to the soul in the full glory of their meaning by the Spirit of God; but, furthermore, how often has it been true that some Spirit-filled child of God, when waiting in some season of prayer and meditation, has been surprised at his own previous ignorance as the Spirit has revealed a new richness of some familiar promise or applied to the special circumstance before him some declaration which otherwise he would never have dreamed could have any such connection

Mysticism,  
fanaticism  
and false  
rationalism.

with the matter that lay upon his heart.

**The Spirit  
Illuminating  
the Word.** There are countless things we oft desire for which no specific promise is found in the Word of God, but, on the other hand, it is hard to imagine a want that God could at all be willing to grant (sinful, selfish desires are of course excluded) that may not be covered by some general promise which it is the Spirit's work to discover to us and apply to the particular object engaging our petition.

The same caution is needed in our seeking to read aright the providential ordering of circumstances. Indeed, to depend upon any one of the three named methods to the exclusion of the others is to leave oneself open to the liability, if not the likelihood, of conviction other than that which comes from God, but one who is earnestly seeking to know the mind of God will give himself carefully and devotedly to them all, and that one God will certainly lead to the knowledge he so much desires to have.

# V

## PRAYING IN FAITH

*“Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye have received them and ye shall have them.”*—MARK 11: 24.

We are now prepared to say a word about the remaining condition of prevailing prayer. It is Faith. It may be God's pleasure to give; it may be His will to give; and yet, not until we believe He is going to give will His pleasure or His will bring to us the thing we <sup>The fourth</sup> <sub>condition.</sub> have desired of Him. Some people make a mistake here. They think that whatever God wills for us must, of course, come to pass. But this is by no means true. For example, “This is God's will, even your sanctification,” but has this come to pass fully in YOUR life? Alas, that so many of us should fall so far short of what God in His goodness wills for us. Though His will be revealed, only so much

will be fulfilled as our faith accepts. God may, in His Word, or in His providence, or by His Spirit, reveal His will for us, but the responsibility for realizing that will in our own experience rests with our own will.

This answers, at least partially, the old question, "Does not prayer influence God?" It does influence His action, even though it be granted, for the present, that it does not influence His will or purpose which are embodied in the love plan He has thought out for every one of His children. God proposes to give, but what He would have given is withheld, and if you would know why, you have only to ask Him to hear Him say, as He once did to some other crushed and defeated disciples, "because of your unbelief." Speaking about one of our needs, which every one must, at times, more or less feel, James says that the one conscious of his need shall "Ask of God who giveth liberally . . . and it shall be given him," but He says,

God's  
thought  
for us no  
always  
realized.

“Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed with the wind; for let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” Were it possible that every other condition of prayer could be fulfilled and faith be lacking, the petition would be only words, vain and unavailing, which, for reasons not hard to discover, are painful enough to the great heart of the Father, and which it would have been better never to have been uttered.

Faith is the hand that takes, and all God’s best thought for you and me is actualized in our experience only through a confidence in God which counts a thing done before it really takes place. With what nicety the Revised Version opens up the deeper meaning of Mark 11:24, so long lost to the English reader.

It has usually been read, Mark 11:24  
in the  
Revised  
Version:  
“Whosoever things ye desire, when you pray, believe that ye receive them and you shall have them,”

but the “ye receive” of the older translation is now correctly made to read, “ye have received.” It is the business of faith to believe that the answer has already been given by God in Heaven before it is received or felt on earth. Rather searching, isn’t it? And presumptuous, did you say? No, child, not that, but blessed is the man who so believes in God and understands the might of God, that he *accepts by faith* the yet unseen and unreceived, and thanks the Giver for what he knows “he shall receive.”

Faith is the key to the Father’s storehouse. Rather annoying, isn’t it, to twist and turn with a key that will not work?

**How to enter the storehouse of God’s abundance.** But the lock is perfect, the bearings all in order, and if Faith is of the right quality and then well tempered, the door will not be hard to open.

So necessary was it and is it for men to see this that it stands out with chiefest prominence in all the teachings of Jesus. Had Jesus done the writing Himself I

think he would have underscored the word with a double line of deepest black. Did He run the press, it might be with raised letters He would burn this truth into our minds. "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23), He said to the father of the afflicted child when the disciples through lack of faith could do nothing. "All things," He said. Puts it rather strongly, doesn't He? These little hearts of ours can scarcely take it in, but that is what He said. He wants us to see how really omnipotent Faith is, and that the disciples who stood rebuked in the presence of their humiliating failure might be assured that He was not speaking with unmeasured words, He took as an illustration the unlikeliest thing that might occur—a mountain slipping away and tumbling off into the sea. If you are looking for a good personification of faith, you must not stop at Hercules. Faith is almighty. "If you have faith, nothing shall be impossible to you."

Jesus  
emphasizing  
the omnip-  
otency  
of faith.

“Faith does not doubting ask, ‘Can this be so?’  
The Lord hath said it and there needs no more.”

Is it hard to see why faith is so essential? Surely, it cannot be. Prayer without faith is self-contradictory. What sort of an insult is it to a man to approach him for a favor and at the same time tell him you have no faith whatsoever that he will give you what you ask? And why mock God in a way like that and at the same time stultify ourselves and treat with such utter contempt the power we might have with Him who “supplieth all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?”

Now, when Jesus says, “Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye have received them,” it is clear that we are to believe that we shall receive the very thing we ask. But, of course, faith that a thing shall be

Faith in  
God's person  
and faith  
in His  
promise. given implies faith in the person from whom we expect it. You cannot believe in a man's promise until you first believe in the man himself. And for this

reason Jesus, just before He made that wonderful prayer promise, first said, "Have faith in God." "He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." We must believe in God as a living, mighty, loving God. We must have faith in His power—that He can do whatsoever He wills to do. We must have faith in His love—that it is His delight to bless; that He would like to give us all we ask, and that He is willing to give us whatsoever is best for us to have.

Yet the Faith we are thinking about now goes beyond even this. We are not only to believe that God can but that He will and that He will give us *the particular thing we ask*.

Andrew Murray ("With Christ in the School of Prayer," page 81) calls attention to a distinction between what he calls the "Prayer of Faith" and the "Prayer of Trust." The Prayer of Trust, he says, has reference to things of which we cannot

The "Prayer  
of Faith"  
and the  
"Prayer of  
Trust."

find out if God is going to give them. As children we make known our desires in the countless things of daily life, and leave it to the Father to give or not, as He thinks best; but "The Prayer of Faith," he says, "of which Jesus speaks is something different, something higher, having taken its stand on some promise of God it knows that it will receive exactly what it asks." Now we are prepared to see the force of the statement made at the beginning. Though you know the will of God, you cannot without faith pray with any assurance that it will be done for you.

So far all is clear, but now we have come to a place where every one is not quite of the same opinion.

Know the will of God; believe when you pray and the answer is sure. No difficulty

**Is faith  
possible  
when the  
will of God  
is unknown?**

about that. But here is a question that is as practical as it is fascinating. Suppose you have not been able to discover the will of God about a certain thing; is it possible to pray with any faith that this

particular thing will be granted? It is no use to answer, as some have done, by saying, "If you are the right kind of a Christian and are praying in the Spirit you will know what is the will of God concerning any matter."

Such an answer is not satisfactory for two reasons:

1. When there is no absolutely clear and definite promise in the Word upon which to rest one's faith, we saw a few pages further back that one might be so strongly inclined to believe that he knew God's will from what he thought was the leadings of God's Spirit and of providence as to be fully satisfied in his own mind about it and yet discover in the end that all the while he had been mistaken. This is true not only of those whose peculiar religious notions, derived, as they claim, from divine revelation, lay them open to the criticism and sometimes pity of sober-minded people, but just as true oftentimes of the most sane

The most  
spiritual  
Christians  
sometimes  
mistaken  
about God's  
will.

and devoted Christian. Here is a man well known to the writer, a man of the highest spiritual attainment. His child, a lad of six, is near death's door. Through the Spirit, he told me, he was so powerfully impressed that it was God's will the child should live that he rested his faith on this assurance and prayed and his child recovered. For years he used this, and honestly, as an illustration that it was our privilege to be absolutely sure of God's will through the voice of His Spirit and so pray with faith. A few years later and the child was again at the point of death. Again he received the assurance of his recovery in the same way, and again he prayed with faith that his child would live, but the child did not live.

2. It is often true when the thing is not definitely promised in the Word, that the most spiritually-minded and truly-devoted Christian cannot satisfy himself as to what is the will of God about it, and it is hardly kind or necessary to find fault with

**The most  
spiritual  
often per-  
plexed about  
God's will:**

his life and Christian attainment because this is so. Andrew Murray, speaking of the prayer of trust, says it has reference to "things of which we cannot find out whether God is going to give them," and, after all, I wonder if it is not true that where there is no specific promise in the Word to cover the thing desired—I wonder, even though the leadings of providence seem to be plain and the voice of the Spirit distinct, if we must not leave a little room at least for an equation of uncertainty. I think so. And a rule that will not work down among the finer distinctions cannot consistently be used in solving the problem in general.

Now, what about the two conditions of mind just mentioned?

In the first case, the man was convinced that it was God's plan for him that he should have the thing he desired. He was mistaken, but his conviction was genuine, and so, of course, there was just as much room for faith as if he had rightly interpreted the will

The lessons  
of mistaken  
faith.

of God. Was his faith genuine? Certainly, only it was resting on a false hope. (The faith of a heathen in his idol is just as genuine *per se* as the faith of a Christian in his God.) When, in the end, the Christian finds his petition denied, he will then know that he was asking for something which could not consistently, with the all-wise and loving plan of God, be granted, and he will not only have learned a little more of how patient and careful one should be in the endeavor to discover the will of God, but he will bow with reverent loving submission to what he knows was for his Father's glory and his own good. (Romans 8: 28.)

In the second case, *when the Christian cannot satisfy himself as to what is the will of God, what is to be done?* Here is where so many of us find ourselves in spite of our effort to meet every requirement which comes from God. Here is where most Christians need help.

The question is, can a Christian under such circumstances have any faith that he

will receive the thing for which he prays? The tendency is to answer, No. One of our leading religious instructors said, "You cannot have uncertainty and certainty at the same time." Another said, "No; faith is not a thing to be pumped up; you cannot just say, 'I am going to believe,' and then believe. Unless you have an absolute promise, a clear revelation of God's will concerning the matter, you can have no faith regarding it whatsoever."

The ques-  
tion stated  
again.

We will not conceal the fact that we have wanted to say, Yes, to the above question—wanted to, because of the help we have felt such an answer would be to the average Christian. For, if we can only pray with faith for what we are certain is God's will, how few of us can really ever so pray, and how very few are the things for which even such Christians so pray. Sift the matter carefully down and see if this is not true.

I am going to answer, Yes, to the question, not for the reason mentioned, how-

ever, which would be no reason at all, but because I am convinced that I can otherwise reasonably do so.

I am quite willing to admit that without an absolutely clear and definite revelation of God's will, there cannot be an absolutely clear and unquestioning faith in the matter of prayer, and this admission, I presume, makes us all at one in the question at hand.

But one may have a conviction, and a strong one, without an absolutely clear

*One may have faith though uncertain of God's will:* and definite revelation, and *he may believe in proportion to the strength or depth of that conviction.* He knows how

kind and good the Father is; he has studied carefully and waited on his knees and sees no reason why this thing should not be granted; he knows he is unselfish in what he asks, and thinks surely it will glorify his God; and as he waits, willing to lay aside his petition the very moment it becomes certain by an absolutely clear and definite revelation that it is *not* God's

will; as he thus waits, there is borne in upon him from time to time a conviction—an impression; it never weakens; it increases and deepens the rather, and satisfies him that what he is asking God is going to give. Who will say that this influence upon his soul, this impression that has become a conviction with him, is not the working of the Holy Spirit Himself drawing the man out into this very prayer which subsequent events prove to have been in harmony with the will and plan of God for him?

Now, of this will the man had at no time an absolutely unquestioning certainty of knowledge. Such a clear revelation had not been given him and yet it was his privilege and duty to believe, *to have faith in proportion at least to the depth of the conviction that came to him.* (Study carefully Matthew 9:2 and 22 and 28; Matthew 15:28 and Mark 10:50, and see if it was not just this faith that was exercised there.)

Now, here is a question: Did that faith

do him any good? Did it have any value in God's sight in securing the desire of his heart? Unhesitatingly we answer, Yes. And just as unhesitatingly we say that without such faith God might never have done for him what He did do because such faith was exercised. (See page 199.)

Under such circumstances as the above I would then:

1. Put an added petition in my prayer, asking God to give me increased light as

How to  
pray when  
uncertain  
of God's will. to His will in the matter, and give myself to seek that light through meditation, the study of the Word, the observation of providence and waiting on the Spirit of God.

2. If God does not show me that the request is NOT according to His will, keep on praying for it with faith as just explained until He does, and should He make it plainly known that the thing is NOT His will, then cease praying, humbly submit to His will, and thank Him for the denial; for God's *No* in such a case is

better than His *Yes*. Do not, however, cease praying unless the knowledge that the request is NOT according to His will be just as clear and certain as must be the knowledge in the case of a man who knows that he is praying according to the will of God.

3. Always close such a petition by saying from the heart, "If it be not Thy will, Thy will, O God, and not mine, be done."

And is it necessary to stop a bit just now that we may be reminded once more of the Holy Spirit and His relation to the faith we have been talking about all the while? If no man can call Jesus "Lord" save through the Spirit, and if the faith that first puts us in the right condition to pray by making us children of the heavenly Father is the gift of God through His Spirit, how plain it is that He must stand back of every taking hold of God for anything. Faith must have some ground upon which to rest. The Holy Spirit supplies it. It is the Holy Spirit who first

*The prayer  
of faith  
and the  
Holy Spirit.*

reveals to us our need. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to us our God in His love and in His power. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to us the promises of God. It is the Holy Spirit who draws us out in prayer for such things as are pleasing to God, and the *it* is the Holy Spirit, the source of all spiritual capacity, who quickens the faith faculty and helps the soul to believe.

How true it is, after all, that without the Holy Spirit abiding in us we can do nothing; and just as true it is that without Him abiding in fullness our prayer life and our whole life will be weak and utterly fail. Say, then, child of the Almighty One, "O Holy Spirit, be Thou my all in all."

## VI

### TIGHTENING THE GRIP

*“And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.”*—GEN. 32.

*“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”*—LUKE 11.

The last word about “How to Pray” has not yet been said. All that has been said might be true, and yet the answer sometime slips from us because we failed at the last ditch, so to speak. Some one has said, “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire.” It is, and if it is, the heart will not faint at a slight delay or at what may seem the indisposition of God to answer. Many pray well up to this point and then utterly fail, and failing, lose all. Too many fail to “pray through.” If the request is not granted at the first or second asking, they cease praying and say, “Perhaps it isn’t God’s will,” and this they call Submission. Dr. Torrey calls it “spiritual

Submission  
and spirit-  
ual sloth dif-  
ferentiated.

laziness," and the Word implies as much quite as emphatically.

Let us give our minds now for a while to what is known to us all at least by name as Opportunity. No phase of prayer is more emphasized in New Testament teaching than this. In both the Gospels and the Epistles it stands out in clear relief. Our study would not be complete if this important factor in prayer were omitted, and our own prayer life will never be what it ought to be until we appreciate as fully as possible God's thought in the exceptional emphasis He has placed on this quality in prayer.

This emphasis reveals itself in two ways.

(1) In Illustration. (2) In a skillful choice of richly expressive words and phrases. These words will form a brief and interesting study in the following chapter. Let us examine the illustrations now.

They are in the form of Parables. Both are furnished by Luke. Luke is the one

who tells us most about the prayer habit of Jesus. The first illustration is that of the Midnight Appeal (Luke 11: 5-13). A supperless friend has arrived.

The parable  
of the  
midnight  
petitioner.

Not to have placed something before him would have been an unpardonable breach of oriental courtesy. And now a most mortifying situation presents itself in the utter absence of all provision from the house. He hastens to his neighbor, makes known his need, and doubtless, to his own surprise, is gruffly repulsed. Although it was evidently a case of misplaced confidence, a repulse was not what he came for, and finally, because of his Importunity (literally, impudence; shamefacedness) his lazy, ungenerous neighbor got up and granted him what he wanted.

Notice, this neighbor was the most unlikely man to represent God. He was selfish, ungenerous and heartless. To do what he did is justly to incur the contempt of all good people. The thing that moved him to grant the request was his own self-

ishness. It looks as if, had Jesus done His best, He could not have presented the case any more disadvantageously for God than He did. But He outdoes the parable in this respect by another. This time it is the parable of the “Unjust Judge” (Luke 18:1-8).

A widow, whose trying position in those days is well known, came to a judge, asking him to avenge her or to do her justice in a claim against her adversary. The word “came” in the original means “kept coming.” This judge, the parable says, “neither feared God nor regarded man,” and he boasted about it too (vs. 4). He had neither piety nor pity. He was a selfish, hardhearted, unprincipled man. As a public functionary he was unjust; as a man he was unkind and cruel, and in his selfish concern for his own comfort he said, “I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she wear me out” (literally, beat my face black and blue).

The immediate point of each parable is

The parable  
of the un-  
just judge.

that Importunity has a power of annoyance that can gain its object in the face of the greatest obstacle. *Jesus is supposing the case.* Men sometimes have thought unkindly of God because of what seemed His indifference to their needs, and these characters chosen are not pictures of what God is or of what Jesus would have us believe God to be, but of what even pious people have sometimes thought Him to be. Read the experience of Job and the 77th Psalm. "Very well," said Jesus, in substance, "suppose God to be as heartless and as ungenerous as you seem to fancy Him to be; pray on and you shall succeed, for I have shown you what importunity will do even under such circumstances."

But Jesus did not leave the illustration here. He gave us something vastly better than that. He is really teaching by contrast, and that contrast is this: If an ungenerous, indifferent neighbor, for whom a little fleshly repose outweighs a friend's dire distress, could be induced to

grant a sorely needed favor by sheer persistence that would not brook a denial, how much more will God, whose love is so <sup>God's character magnified by contrast.</sup> intense and whose chief delight it is to give, be moved by faithful, persistent entreaty to grant His children what they ask. If a defenseless widow's persistent appeal can wring from a hard-hearted, unscrupulous judge her heart's desire, how much more will our petitions, if likewise faithful, secure the thing we ask from God, who in character is the very opposite of this Godless judge and whose own dearest interests are involved in ours. That this is the real point in each of these parables there can be no reasonable doubt, and consequently when any one asks, as people often do, "Why is it that I must go so repeatedly to God and so persist in the request I would make, as if 'His mercy were clean gone forever' and He were loath to give," the plain teaching of these parables must be that the difficulty is not with God but with ourselves. If importunity in praying to

God presents to your mind a difficulty, in justice to the character of God it can be resolved in no other way. Hence Jesus hastens in either case to speak of the real character of God. He says in one instance, “If an evil, earthly parent knows how to give good gifts to his children, *how much more* will the Father in heaven give good things to His children who ask of Him,” and in the second instance, “And *shall not* God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him, and He is longsuffering in their behalf.” That is, “If an unrighteous judge, *how much more* a God such as the elect have.”

Importunity is not a test of God, but a test of you and me. The difficulty lies with us; and what is it? What other can it be but our own unfitness to receive what we ask and what He longs to give? Importunity is one of the instructors in God’s training school for Christian culture. “There are secrets of love and wisdom in the workings of the ‘Delayed

Importunity  
a test of the  
Christian  
and not of  
the Chris-  
tian’s God.

Blessings Department' which are little dreamt of," but asking and seeking and knocking patiently and persistently not only secures the blessing, but discovers to us the "secrets" of that "love and wisdom" in the undoubting faith and unfaltering trust, the enlarged consciousness of our utter helplessness apart from Him, the heart searching and the surrender of all that seemed to be in the way, the close fellowship with God—in a word, the strengthened and ennobled character that always comes from the refining fires of difficulty and trial. Don't read the parables so hastily and you'll see it all written there.

"Shall not God avenge his own elect, . . . though He is long-suffering over them?" Why should scholars be puzzled here?

The long-suffering of God. The English revised version reads, "and He is," etc., but this with what goes before makes an unwieldy sentence. The American revised version is better, "and yet He is," etc. This leaves the construction

practically as in the authorized version, "although He is longsuffering over them." Over whom? the wicked? No. Over the elect; over us who are the children of God. Literally it is "in their behalf."

Now look at James 5:7. "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being longsuffering over it till it receive the early and the later rain." This shows us what longsuffering means; that it is for a purpose. Some one has said, "Men would pluck their mercies green, when the Lord would have them ripe." We are so like children, but the Husbandman knows what proper development needs. It needs time; it needs culture; it needs training. He is therefore patient, longsuffering, until all these elements have poured their influence upon the soul and made it ripe to receive and keep and properly use what He has long planned to give them. "Longsuffering in our behalf"—that exactly this may be true of you and me. This is the meaning of importunity.

## 224 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

“Unanswered yet? The prayer your lips have  
pleaded

In agony of heart these many years?  
Does faith begin to fail; is hope departing,  
And think you all in vain those falling tears?  
Say not the Father hath not heard your prayer;  
You shall have your desire sometime, somewhere.

“Unanswered yet? Though when you first pre-  
sented

This petition at the Father’s throne,  
It seemed you could not wait the time of asking,  
So urgent was your heart to make it known.  
Though years have passed since then, do not de-  
spair;  
The Lord will answer you sometime, somewhere.

Unanswered yet? Nay, do not say ungranted;  
Perhaps your part is not yet wholly done.

The work began when first your prayer was ut-  
tered,

And God will finish what he has begun.  
If you will keep the incense burning there,  
His glory you shall see sometime, somewhere.

“Unanswered yet? Faith can not be unanswered.  
Her feet were firmly planted on the Rock;

Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,  
Nor quails before the loudest thunder shock.  
She knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,  
And cries, 'It shall be done,' sometime, some-  
where."



Book Five  
Why Our Prayers Are Not  
Answered



# I

## WHY OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED

*“Ye ask and ye receive not because—”*—JAS. 5:3.

If parts of this study have been a trifle hard and a bit difficult to understand, we are now at the part where writer and reader must understand whether they will or not. This may not be the most pleasing part to read for some of us, for some of it is sure to rise up from the page and condemn us, but it is the easiest to write about, because there are no knotty problems to solve; no mysteries to unravel in answer to the question that stands with such searching emphasis at the head of this chapter.

God does answer prayer, and yet so many thousands are complaining of prayers that have been unanswered; and you may be thinking the question now, If it be

An easy  
question to  
answer.

true that God can and does answer prayer, and why is it that He does not answer mine? Let me say it in the bluntest possible way, You can answer that question for yourself a good deal better than any one else can answer it for you. It used to be said of Luther, that he could ask anything he wanted of God and get it, but God has no favorites in this matter, and if your prayers are not answered, nothing is surer in the world than this, that the fault is yours and not God's.

By an answered prayer is meant one to which God has said Yes. No use to evade this by tampering with definitions. Some

**What is  
meant by  
answered  
prayer?**

say that "asking and getting things from God is a pitifully small conception of prayer."

Well, it is if *all* that is implied in prayer ends in your mind just there. Nevertheless, the fundamental idea of prayer is just that. Both your Bible and your dictionary are authority for this. "Ask and ye shall receive"—i. e., *the thing you ask: not something else.* Some

say God's No is as much an answer to prayer as His Yes. But No is a denial—it is a *negative* answer, but when you pray the answer you wish and expect is God's Yes and not His No, and this is what the average child of God has in mind when he is thinking or talking about answered prayer.

Let us ponder awhile over these unanswered petitions. Bear well in mind, in the first place, that

**DELAYED ANSWERS ARE NOT DENIALS**

God's purposes are planet sized, and even His plans for you and me are often-times much bigger and better than our short-ranged vision warrants us in believing. You may pray in strictest keeping with the conditions laid down in the preceding pages, which sort of praying we have seen makes the answer certain, yet it does not follow therefrom that the answer must come just at the time or just in the way expected.

God's time  
better for  
man than  
his own.

But if the answer is delayed, you may be sure some purpose in the divine mind is being served, or some obstacle stands in the way which a little time only can remove.

1. The answer may be delayed as a means of spiritual discipline. We are here to be educated and God knows best how to time His good gifts to that end. Humility, patience and hope; how much we need such virtues as these and a Faith that

“Knows Omnipotence hath heard her prayer,  
And cries, ‘It shall be done,’ sometime, somewhere”;

and what heavenly graces are to-day adorning many a soul because of a period of suffering hard to bear and a good deal harder to understand, except for the sweet knowledge that God’s best is being accomplished, and that some glad day “the whole of life’s painful experience will be poured into song before the throne.”

If Jacob’s desire had been given to him

The training  
school of  
spiritual  
character.

in time for him to get a good night's rest, he might never have become the prince of prayer we know to-day. If Hannah's prayer for a son had been answered at the time she set for herself, the nation might never

Hannah's  
prayer for  
a son.

have known the mighty man of God it found in Samuel. Hannah wanted only a son, but God wanted more. He wanted a prophet, a ruler and a saviour for His people. Some one has said that in this instance "God had to get a woman before He could get a man." This woman He got in Hannah precisely by delaying the answer to her prayer, for out of the discipline of those weeks and months and years there came a woman with a vision like God's, with tempered soul and gentle spirit and seasoned will, prepared to be the kind of a mother for the kind of a man God knew the nation needed.

2. The answer may be delayed by the very force of circumstances. You want to know if God cannot overcome these instanter? Yes, He doubtless can, but it is

hardly the part of reverent trust to ask Him to do the miraculous if He can do this thing in His own good time in any other way. Impatience with God is the meanest sort of distrust. To pray for the instant healing of a diseased body is to ignore every second cause and every law of nature and to ask God to do the same, and that we fear not so much for His glory as for our own gratification.

**God works along the line of least resistance.** May not the same thing be true in some instances when prayer is sent up for the instant conversion of some soul? In fact, of the two is not the former much more reasonable? God can handle the laws of nature as He will, but can He thus handle a human will and still leave the individual a free, moral and responsible agent? A man's will must be influenced by motives; the evil of sin must be seen and something of the character of God appreciated. The power of these motives depends a good deal upon their proper presentation by the proper person and at the proper time.

We do not need to explain why, but just to recognize what God has shown us to be true, that He has chosen to limit Himself very largely to human instrumentality in saving another man's soul. God will not coerce a man's will, but He may remove him from influences that have made it hard for him to be reached and bring him into new surroundings that may lead to the saving of his soul. In all these things the element of time must not be ignored.

No! child of faith, a delay is not a denial. The answer must come, but at a time known only to His infinite wisdom. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come; it will not tarry."

And yet prayers do go unanswered. "Ye ask and ye receive not because—" Well, it might be, thinking back through what has been said before, because the specific petition you make is not in harmony with God's better plans for you.

1. Petitions are sometimes denied because if granted they would bring us positive injury. True wisdom, if we had it, would never allow us to be at cross-purposes with God.

What answered prayer would sometimes mean.

“ . . . So weak is man,  
So ignorant and blind, that did not God  
Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,  
We should be ruined at our own request.”

You denied your little one the razor he craved, but you knew why. (And possibly if we would all think back a little through our own history we could recall some earnest prayer of the heart, some cry of the soul, which later events proved to be against our own best welfare.) Is not a word of warning appropriate just here? Is there not some peril in prayers that are uttered rashly and persistently. Some of our best lessons are learned in the school of adversity. Here is an illustration gathered from the writings of a fellow minister:

“A pastor’s wife once prayed for the life

of her child, sick with scarlet fever. She demanded that her child be spared, telling God that she could not give up her boy. The child lived, but was deaf, dumb and idiotic. It would have been far better if the mother had consented to the Lord's will and the Lord had taken the lad to Himself.

Does God do things like that? What ponderous questions come up about God! Is God responsible for everything? No, He certainly is not. Yet we know that Israel prayed amiss in the wilderness and God "gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." God answered Hezekiah's prayer, but the fifteen years of life He gave him brought sorrow into his own family and woe and misery to Jerusalem and all Judea. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God."

2. Petitions are sometimes denied that the larger desire of our heart may be granted. Augustine's mother prayed fer-

vently that her boy might be kept from going to Rome, but God permitted him to go. Yet the going to Rome became the means of Augustine's conversion, and very beautifully he says that God denied his mother once to grant her what she had prayed for always.

3. Closely akin to this is the denial of our prayer in order that a higher and better blessing may come to us. Earnestly and repeatedly did Paul pray that a certain thorn in his flesh—some constantly pricking irritation that had come into his life—might be taken away; but God let him know it was a thing in which he would some day glory, and I imagine when Paul looked back upon it from the close of his life he would tell those gathered about him of the special nearness of God and the glory presence of Jesus which had been a millionfold sweeter to him than any fleshly ease the removal of that ugly, annoying thorn might have brought him.

**One petition  
denied for  
the sake of  
another.**

**Why the  
thorn in  
Paul's flesh  
was not  
removed.**

If a mother bending over her sick child and praying with all the intensity of motherly affection could only have lodged in some way in her heart the unmistakable conviction that its early removal was the sure condition of its eternal salvation, would she not gladly relinquish the smaller desire of her heart that it might be swallowed up in the greater blessing that represented the answer to the greatest prayer a mother heart can make.

Those of you who have read the little book entitled "Expectation Corner" will remember how Adam Slowman's guide stopped in front of a handsome storehouse and told him it was <sup>The Royal Exchange Office.</sup> the Royal Exchange Office, "the place," he said, "where our Lord Himself considers our applications and changes His grants to what is really most for our good. Some ask for success and speedy deliverance," he said, "and they get disappointments which bring them nearer to Him who will deliver them gloriously *in trouble* if not always *out* of trouble.

Some ask for health of body and they get health of soul instead and learn what it is to gain the highest attainable gift of a submitted will which brings changeless peace and is worth all the prosperity gifts put together."

If we could only pass, like Doddridge in his famous dream, into the spirit world and find, as he did, our own life traced on the wall of our own chamber, we too could run our eyes along the mysterious lines and discover His appointment in every disappointment, and learn that our final glory is reached through prayers that have been answered in larger measure than we had ever ventured to implore.

What we have said so far may be taken as a partial answer to the question introducing this chapter, but it has not one thing to do with the difficulty as presented in the Scripture which stands alongside the question. These have been denials because of petitions either out of harmony with God's richer plan for us or out of the line along which God must act to bring

us the larger blessings we have craved, but the Scripture to which we have referred says, "Ye ask and receive not because—" and then follows a reason that startles you. The longer you think about it the bigger it gets. It brings a sensation with it—not the most pleasant, did you say? You begin to search your own heart and to think about your own life, and the first thing you know you find yourself wondering if, after all, this may not be that which more than anything else has kept the blessing away. The matter of the prayer may have been all right, but the heart which indited it has been all wrong. It is the life, you will recall, that prays, and some evil in your life has broken the connection between yourself and God.

The reason  
for un-  
answered  
prayer ac-  
cording to  
St. James.

What does God say about this?

1. First, He makes it plain that it is our sin that deafens His ear. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that

it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2). God says it is your sin that is hindering your prayer. God hates sin with a perfect

To live in sin  
is to lose the  
right to pray. hatred. His greatest horror is to have hands stretched out to

Him that are all soiled and besmirched with it. In fact, He will not look; He will not listen. "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you" (Isaiah 1:15). The very privilege of prayer implies the most intimate relation with God. Indeed, some say its chief essence is *communion* with God. It is communion and more: it is *community*, just because it is communion of the most intimate sort. God makes over to me what belongs to Him, and I am expected to be thus equally loyal to Him. It is, in fact, partnership. But I have sinned against my partner. I have done the mean, low thing that has injured Him, and not only have I lacked the de-

cency to apologize for it, but I am doing the thing repeatedly! How, then, can I expect any fellowship with Him or any favor from Him?

Here is the trouble. We have looked down deep into our own hearts and we have found the thing that God has put His finger on time and again, and it's there still. It may be some sin of the past yet unconfessed and unforgiven, or it may be some sin that is being cherished to-day, and all the while here is His word: "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). It is the in-wrought, fervent prayer of the *righteous* man that availeth much. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." Is it not time to say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart"? If we want power in prayer we must be merciless in dealing with our sins. No quarter must be shown here.

2. There is another certain thing, just a special form of sin that is mentioned as

crippling our power to pray, and that is the *unforgiving spirit*. Can an un-  
Prayer and  
the unfor-  
giving spirit. pardoned sinner hope to have any influence with God? Then hear! “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you.” This lack of loving one another—Aye, this actual hatred of each other—what a dark, ugly thing it is! “Murder already,” God calls it, and to hold it and to harbor it is to lose His pardon and His favor. If prayer is, or implies, or is based upon communion, community, partnership, then the disposition of the one must be the disposition of the other. The closet door of prayer has two hinges. One is, “Love God supremely,” and the other “is like unto it,” “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The “recompense” of the “Father who seeth in secret” comes when the “door is shut,” but the door will never swing on broken hinges. Many a person who might have power with God is losing the best wish of their heart—some mighty blessing from

heaven—just for the contemptible and miserable gratification of hating some one who has possibly injured them. Jesus makes it very plain that we must say farewell to enmity or stand back from the holy place.

In the fifth chapter of Matthew, He says, “If thou bring thy gift to the altar—that is, when thou comest to pray—and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift and go first and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Reconciliation goes before worship. “A broken and contrite heart” He will not despise, but His message to the unforgiving heart is, “Leave thy gift and go and be reconciled.” It is S. D. Gordon who has said, “The shortest way to God for that man is not the way to the altar but around by that man’s house.” “But, Lord, here’s \$100,000 to endow a Christian university.” “Leave there thy gift and go and be reconciled.” “But, Lord, I’m a pillar

The message  
of Jesus to  
the unfor-  
giving.

in the church, and the largest subscription to its treasury is mine.” “Leave there thy gift and go.” “But, Lord, others speak well of my life and Thou knowest I am faithful to all the services in the sanctuary, and every one knows I am not the one to blame in this offense.” “Leave there thy gift and go first and be reconciled, and then come and offer thy gift.” Plain enough! isn’t it? But He would have no misunderstanding about it. So munificent and liberal, so bountiful and unsparing might be your gifts for charity’s sake, that all the world would be singing doxol-

**Good works  
do not com-  
mend a sin-  
ning man  
to God.**

gies of praise to your generosity. You might be counted a Christian of deep spiritual experience; Aye, you might go as a herald of the Gospel into heathen lands, but if you left behind one unreconciled person whom you have not in the tender and loving spirit of the Christ endeavored to reconcile, whatever you give, whatever you are, wherever you go, your heart will not be right in the sight of God, and when

you bow down at His altar you will hear these words, "Go and be reconciled to thy brother," and when you have gone and done your part and come again, then will the heavens open and your prayer will enter and the blessing of God will be upon you.

3. Yet one other thing brings denial to our prayers. This is that in particular which St. James had in mind when he wrote the Scripture part of which we started with at the beginning of this chapter. "Ye ask and ye receive not." Now let the Apostle finish it for us—"because ye ask amiss," that is, wickedly; and now he tells us why—"that ye may consume it upon your lusts," or, more literally, "that ye may spend it in your pleasures." This means praying with a selfish purpose. The very form of the second verb "ask" is changed into what is called the middle voice, that is, "asking for oneself," and this is the secret that explains why so many prayers go unanswered. They are selfish prayers.

The prayer  
that "asks  
amiss."

Possibly if we would hold this text up before us as a mirror we might some of us see our own face reflected there. We sometimes want a thing just because *we* want it—want it for ourselves. With God's great purpose for the world and some part, whether small or great, He would have us take we are not concerned. The truth—the plain truth, spoken as bluntly as words can speak—is that our selfishness is paralyzing our petitions. Here is an individual praying that the power of the Holy Spirit may be upon him. It is a splendid prayer to make. It is just for that which God so much wants

**Seeking the  
glory of self  
instead of  
the glory  
of God.**

every child of His to have, but way back in the breast of the one who offers the prayer is something that spoils it all and makes the petition a sheer waste of words and a thing abominable in the sight of God. What a fine thing for himself it would be to have this power. He has seen some mighty man of God in a marvelous ministry, and the power that man had he

has coveted for himself; and why? This is it—the purpose—that makes it right or wrong. And if we search honestly for the reason, some of us, I fear, would find our own ambitions striking us full in the face.

You have asked God to heal your disease, but just why do you want your failing health restored? One of the members of Dr. Dixon's church came to him once and said, "Pastor, I want you to pray for my healing, for I am afflicted." Dr. Dixon said, "I knew why she was afflicted; she had been spending two or three nights a week at a ball or theater, and as a result of her dissipation she was afflicted." He said, "What do you want to live for, any way?" and he said, "I could see that her principal reason for desiring health was that she might attend more balls, give more parties and have a better time in the world. She wanted health that she might spend it in her own pleasures and for God to have answered her prayers would have

A church  
member's  
prayer for  
health.

been to fix her in a worldly life forever," and he did not pray.

Here is a mother praying for her boy. It would make such a nice young man out of him to be a Christian; it would keep her from any further disgrace—it would be such a joy to her to have such a son, and then the thought of his being lost forever is so painful. But if God should say, "I need a missionary for the jungles of Africa, and I shall redeem your boy for that noble work," she would cry, "Oh, no, Lord, not my boy for that!" Selfish prayer! Many a woman is praying the same way for the conversion of her husband.

And if we would dig down deep and examine the tap-root at its very end possibly we might discover some such motive in many of our prayers for a revival. Of

Why we sometimes long for a revival.

course, we persuade ourselves—if we can—that it is otherwise; the thing is so contemptibly mean that we spurn the thought of it; in fact, we don't think it;

we don't allow ourselves to. But a revival means something; increased membership, easier finances, splendid reports at Conference or Presbytery, prestige among the brethren and possibly a better call. We know better than any one else that we are zealous for God's glory, but if while we are planning and praying for a revival these other unworthy thoughts flit through the mind with persistent recurrence, we'll have to account for them some way, and usually just a bit of deep, genuine heart-searching will do it; and the revival does not come.

Oh, for a hungering and thirsting only for God's glory; for a passion something like the Son of God's, that cannot bear to see men lost; for a zeal for the house of God that cannot endure to see it dishonored by the worldliness of its professed worshipers. Oh, for an utter self-forgetting concern for the thing that is dearest to God that cannot bear to think of one jot or tittle of His word being made void by the proud unbelief of the day! How

the sound of abundance of rain would be heard in the land; how the windows of heaven would go up; how the mighty floods of blessing would come!

“Ye ask and ye receive not because—”  
Fill it out for yourself, and when you have hit upon the thing that is hiding God’s

**Making the  
matter  
personal.** face and taking the sense of His presence away from you, put it away by His grace, for it is sin, and where there is sin He will

not tarry. It may be something we have not thought of before as wrong, but if we say, and say it sincerely, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thought, and see if there be any evil thing in me,” He will discover the thing to us that ought to go from us.

“Oh, for the times when on my heart,  
Long prayer hath never palled;  
Times when the ready thought of God  
Would come when it was called.

“What can have locked these fountains up,  
Those visions what hath stayed;

What sudden act hath thus transformed  
My sunshine into shade?

“One thing alone, dear Lord, I dread,  
To have a secret spot  
That separates my soul from Thee  
And yet to know it not.

“If it hath been sin of mine,  
Then show that sin to me;  
Not to get back the sweetness lost,  
But to make my peace with Thee.”



Book Six  
A Study in Words



## A STUDY IN WORDS\*

We want in these closing pages to consider in a few lines what might well be made a volume in itself. There is a wealth of meaning hidden away in the various words which the Bible uses when speaking of prayer and in various other words used in connection with prayer; and there is much about prayer that can be learned better if not only by a study of these words. To those of us who believe that God Himself had a care even in the wording of the thoughts He inspired, this study will be doubly significant.

We shall do nothing more than present the matter in briefest outline.

I. There is, first, the words which are themselves used to designate prayer. There are seven Greek words in the New Testament variously translated "to pray,"

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\* The suggestion for the study in this Chapter comes to the writer from Macgregor's "Praying in the Holy Ghost," a most helpful and inspiring little volume.

“to beseech,” “to supplicate,” “to ask,” “to intercede,” “to entreat,” “to call upon,” each of which might without violence to the term be translated by our English

Greek and Hebrew words used to designate prayer. word “pray.” We are now, of course, referring to prayer in its broader meaning as an approach unto God. In the Old

Testament there are twelve Hebrew words similarly translated. Some of the terms are to a degree synonymous, words of the New Testament finding their equivalents in the Old Testament. For the spirit and temper in which we ought to pray no better guide can be found than these words themselves.

Of course, in setting forth the primary significance of these words it is not meant that they are used in Scripture only with this particular shade of meaning. It would be quite impossible to go through Scripture and establish any such distinction which would hold true in each particular use of the word in question, but the lesson to be learned in this study is that

each word carries its own particular truth and when taken together they enrich the meaning of prayer as nothing else can do.

Now, if prayer is to secure the thing for which it goes to God, *certain things must be true of God and certain other things must be true of man*. There must be on God's part, first the *power* and then the *willingness* to give. True prayer implies a recognition of these two things.

1. It implies a recognition of divine sovereignty. God's willingness to give would boot us nothing if the power were not His to do it. It is a rich word which teaches us this, and the one most frequently used in the Old <sup>PALAL.</sup> Testament. It is *palal*, and with its noun, *tephillah*, is used 147 times. It appeals to the sovereign majesty of God as one whose prerogative it is to decide the merits of the case and who has the power to put His will concerning the matter into swift execution. It rests its case with Him in entire self-surrender, confident that the Judge of all the earth will do right. It is

used in petitions of various sorts, but especially in prayers of intercession. It is the word used by Samuel in 1 Sam. 12:23, where he said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

2. It implies a recognition of divine grace. Power to give and willingness to give are often at farthest extremes. But it is true not only that "Power belongeth unto God," but that "The Lord **CHANAN.** is plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Him" (Ps. 86:5). How could one pray without believing this to be true? This lesson is taught especially in the Old Testament word *chanan*. The verb primarily means "to be inclined towards," then "to be gracious," and then it comes to mean in one of its tenses, "to entreat for mercy." It is usually translated "supplication." It is the word Solomon uses so often in the dedicatory prayer of the temple. (1 Kings 8:33, 47, 59.)

There must be also certain dispositions

on the part of man who is to approach God in prayer, and these all are implied in true prayer.

1. True prayer implies a recognition of one's own need. He will never pray successfully without this. This is brought out by the Greek word *deomai*, translated by "pray" in Matt. 9:6, "Pray **DEOMAI** and ye therefore the Lord of the **LACHASH**. harvest," etc., and by "beseech" in Luke 9:38, "Master, I beseech thee look upon my son." Prayer without the sense of need is purposeless and therefore powerless. Quite similar to this is the Hebrew word *lachash*, in Isa. 26:16, "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." It is the prayer of dire extremity.

2. True prayer implies the most ardent desire. It is "they who hunger and thirst" whose souls are filled and satisfied. To fail here is to fail utterly. This **BEAH**. message is brought to us in the Hebrew word *beah*. It is a rare word, is

translated “pray” in Dan. 6:11, and literally means “to boil,” as boiling water. From this is derived metaphorically the idea of the fervent, ardent longing of the soul.

3. True prayer implies a recognition of one’s own helplessness. The midnight petitioner said, “I have *nothing* to set before my unexpected guest.” It was a situation of utter impotence. Perhaps the word more suggestive of this than any other is the New Testament word *parakaleo*. The preposition *para* means “along side of,” while the verb *kaleo* means “to call.” From this comes the word **PARAKA-  
LEO.** clete, John’s designation of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Helper and Sustainer. *Parakaleo* is usually translated “beseech.” It is the word used by Jairus when “he besought Jesus greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death” (Mark 5:23). “Thrice,” said Paul, “for this thing I besought the Lord” (2 Cor. 12:8). Self-sufficiency never finds its way to the feet of God.

4. True prayer implies a becoming sense of reverence and awe. It recognizes the divine splendor and magnificence and the true suppliant will feel something of what Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne high and lifted up” and heard the seraphims crying one to another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.” The word most expressive of this is the Hebrew *athar*. It carries with it the idea of worship. In fact, **ATHAR.** its first meaning is “to burn incense,” and the noun is used in Zeph. 3:10, to designate a worshiper of God. Every prayer, to be genuine, must first be an incense. The one who prays will remember that he is entering the holiest of holies and that God, the infinitely Holy One, is there.

5. True prayer implies a recognition of one's own unworthiness. This truth seems to lie especially in the **CHALAH.** Old Testament word *chalah*, which is used so frequently when God's

wrath is deprecated and when one in penitence seeks to appease His anger. It means literally "to stroke," "to smooth," and then "to conciliate by caress," to stroke one's face and smooth its stern furrows. This is the word Moses used when praying for idolatrous Israel (Ex. 32:11). See also 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 13:41; Dan. 9:13, and 1 Sam. 13:12. It is the "God be merciful to me a sinner" of the publican. It is the "contrite heart" such as David presented in his Psalm of confession, which the Lord will not despise (Ps. 51).

6. True prayer implies a proper reflection. It is studied and deliberate, and not hurried. Remember in whose presence thou art, and "Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God." The soul must be calm and meditative. The word teaching **SIACH** and us this is the Hebrew word **HAGA.** *siach.* It is the word used of Isaac when he went out into the field to meditate, and is so translated in Gen.

24:63. It is the word used when the Psalmist says, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (Ps. 103:34). It is translated "prayer" in Ps. 55:17, and literally means "to muse," "to ponder over." In the Greek translation of the Old Testament this last reference is rendered "narrate fully," that is, going over it all carefully beforehand. There is one other word containing somewhat the same idea, though hardly so expressive. It is *haga*, and is used quite as frequently as the other. (See Ps. 63:6.)

7. True prayer implies frank, open simplicity and directness. It is our privilege to "come boldly," without fear, but that so far as the Father's heart is concerned, the very thing we want is the very thing He would delight to give. Our requests will then be direct and definite. This seems to me the meaning brought out especially by the New Testament words *aiteo* and *erotao* and their Old Testament equivalent *shaal*. The exact distinction between

AITEO,  
EROTAO  
and SHAAL.

*aiteo* and *erotao* has been much disputed. Some would have us think *aiteo* gives prominence to the superiority of the person addressed, while *erotao* implies a certain equality and familiarity between the two; but New Testament usage does not bear this out. That probably is the true distinction (if there is any) which makes *aiteo* (which seems to be a little less intense than the other) lay emphasis more especially on the thing to be *given*, and *erotao* on the *person* who is to *do* something for you. The words mean simply "to make request." Such frankness and simplicity in prayer is possible only with a conscience void of offence. When clean hands are lifted up, God's greatest delight is to fill them.

8. True prayer implies the childlike spirit and a confiding approach unto God. This is brought to us in the Greek word **ENTUNCH.** *entunchano*. It is the word that **ANO.** gives prominence to childlike confidence, and represents prayer as the heart's converse with God. It is the word

used in intercession, as when a child goes to its father in behalf of another. We are children in Christ, and nothing pleases the Father more than the utter absence of all misgiving and affectation in the appeal of his own child to His heart. It is used in 1 Tim. 2:1, "that . . . intercessions be made for all men," and is the word that represents the pleadings of Christ in our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

9. True prayer implies an expectant attitude of the soul. An expectancy that gladdens the heart in anticipation of the coming blessing and is an utter stranger to surprise when the thing desired comes to pass. This is really the faith that believes we "have received" (Mark 11:24, R. V.). It is a confidence born of the Spirit and, if so, it can never be betrayed. Its ground is the intimacy of the soul with Jesus. This lesson is the one more especially peculiar to the Aramaic word *tsala*. The word is used but twice; once in Dan. 6:10, and once in Ezra 6:10. It means "to bend," and in its root

TSALA.

significance, as may be seen by tracing it in the Arabic, has reference to the bending in the back of a mare before foaling, accompanied as it always is by the strengthening of the tissues in anticipation of the strain about to come upon them. It is this root to which Daniel and Ezra have gone to select for us a word which means "to pray." They would not have us tarry before God in idle utterance and call it prayer.

10. True prayer implies earnestness and intensity. The word which carries this meaning with it more especially than any other is a New Testament one. It is

**EKTENOS** the word *ektenos*, as used in  
and **PAGA.** Acts 12: 5, where it is most un-

happily translated in the Authorized Version by "without ceasing," but in the Revised Version it is made to read "earnestly." It literally means "stretched-out-ed-ly." "Intensely" would be a good translation. It is a word representing the soul under the sway of an intense passion; stretched out, with its every

energy strained in the exercise to which it is devoted. It is the prayer that forgets all things else in the intensity of its desire and its determined hold upon God. There is no wandering of thought here. All there is of a man goes into a prayer like that. It is this word which is used of Jesus in Gethsemane, where it is said, "being in an agony he prayed *more earnestly*."

There is an Old Testament word corresponding somewhat to this word *ektenos*. It is *paga*. In its first sense it means "to strike upon, or against." Among its several derived meanings are, (1) to rush upon any one with hostile violence (1 Sam. 22: 17, 18, and Judges 8: 21); (2) in a good sense, "to assail any one with petitions," to earnestly urge upon him your request. True prayer is an intense work both of the mind and of the heart. We pray only as we "stir ourselves to take hold on God." Augustine speaks of one who prayed as if he would expire, "*expirare orando*"— expire while praying; breathe out his

very life, as some one has said, in the exercise.

This is not the same as Importunity, although it is a part of it. Importunity means not only to pray thus earnestly, but above all to be persistent in it, but how naturally it associated itself with such prayer; for one who prays with such intensity is not likely to falter or be discouraged if the first effort does not bring the desired response. How naturally, then, it follows that:

11. True prayer implies a persevering faith. A faith that will not falter at delay. It believes and keeps on believing. This is the other element of importunity (*anαιδεια*, literally “shamelessness”) in the parable of the ungenerous neighbor (Luke 11:5-8), and of the unjust judge who was worn out (*hupopiadzine*, literally “to beat the face black and blue”) by the continual coming of the widow. The same Hebrew

**PAGA.** word *paga*, as just noted, carries this idea along with it. We need that sanctified energy of will that

persists in its suit till God clearly bids it cease. God has His postponements as well as His appointments.

12. True prayer implies humility and the submissive spirit—a will resigned to God. We may not always know God's will, but we do know always that, "All things work together HIKETA-  
RIA. for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to His purpose," and can therefore well afford to say, "Thy will, O God, be done." If this lesson is taught in one word more than in another it is in the Greek word *hiketaria*. It is used only once in all the New Testament (Heb. 5:7), and then concerning the One who in Gethsemane prayed and said, "Not my will but thine, O God, be done." It really means a humble, prostrate entreaty against impending evil. The word has a history worth finding out, and the study of it is fascinating.

If we own ourselves the Lord's, the surrender must be complete and the will

cannot be kept back. Gethsemane's "nevertheless" may mean thorns instead of roses for a while, but God's best is always at the end of the way.

13. True prayer implies loyalty and devotion to God. So far are His interests above our own that if the "cup cannot pass away" we will drink it even though it lead us to Calvary. This seems to be

the lesson taught us by that **PROSEUCH-** sacred word *proseuchomai*, used **OMAI.**

120 times in the New Testament. It is used only of prayer to God. It is always translated by the word "pray" and is used of Jesus when He prayed in Gethsemane. "He kneeled down and prayed" (Luke 22:44). This is something more than resignation; something more than submission. It is saying, "Thy will, O God, be done"; but it is more. It is the devotement of self to God in seeing that His will *is* done.

II. But rich as are these lessons which come from a study of the words which themselves mean prayer, none the less so

are those we learn from the words used in connection with prayer.

1. From 1 Thessalonians 5:17, comes the lesson that

WE ARE TO PRAY UNCEASINGLY

The word is *adialeipos*. It means simply "without leaving off." It is used only in three other places.\* It is quite like in meaning to the <sup>ADIALEI-</sup>  
<sup>POS.</sup> word *diapantos* (used of Cornelius in Acts 10:2), and to the quite frequent and more common word *pantote*, used eleven times in connection with prayer.† "Men ought always to pray." Frugality here is dangerous economy. Not always on one's knees, but always living and moving in the atmosphere of prayer. This is that "closer walk with God." Something is wrong where the life languishes. Health of soul demands "the unbroken connection."

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\* Rom. 1:9; 1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Thess. 2:13.

† Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3, 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:2, 33; Thess. 1:3, 11; Phil. 4:11; 2 Thess. 2:13.

2. Not very unlike this is the lesson that

WE ARE TO PRAY UNDER EVERY  
CIRCUMSTANCE

The expression which seems to me to more especially convey this truth is the one found in Luke 21:36, "Watch ye

**EN PANTI  
KAIRO.** therefore and pray in every season," and also in Ephesians

6: 18, "praying in every season." The expression is *en panti kairo*, and is used only the twice. We are wrestling against powers (Eph. 6) that lie in wait for us. They will take us unawares if they can. If we forget God when the sun shines and are grieved at Him when the clouds come, we shall find our feet slipping from beneath us and the Evil One will have gotten the victory in a struggle for which there would have been no occasion had we remembered and practiced what our Lord did say, that, in every season, under every circumstance, we need to pray.

3. Another message comes to us out of 1 Corinthians 7:5, where we learn that

## WE ARE TO TAKE TIME FOR PRAYER

The word is *scholazo*. It is used only here in the New Testament with reference to persons. It is used twice elsewhere (Matt. 12: 44 <sup>SCHOLAZO.</sup> and Luke 11: 25) with reference to things. In the latter sense it means "empty," and is applied both times to a house left unoccupied. When used with reference to persons, the word means unoccupied in the sense of being at leisure, having nothing to do and at liberty to devote one's time and self to a thing.

We are not to be hurried in our devotions. Who was it that said, "Could ye not watch with me *one hour?*" As if that were a *little* while to devote to a thing like that! But many of us would doubtless be embarrassed by arithmetical calculations just at this point. If prayer is important we *ought* to have time for it. If it were a pleasure we *would* have time for it, and if we could really say of Him, "Whom having not seen we love," what a pleasure it would be! When the white handker-

## 276 *How Can God Answer Prayer?*

chief lay just before Gordon's tent door, the weightiest matters of his queen's kingdom must wait, for Gordon was communing with God. "Give yourselves unto prayer." Put other business aside. Let the mind and the soul be at leisure for this one thing. This is the message of the verse.

4. And now, from another word, comes the command that sounds somewhat strange. It tells us that

### WE ARE TO BE SOBER WHEN WE PRAY

In 1 Peter 4:7 the revised reading is, "Be ye therefore of sound mind and be sober unto prayer." The word is *nepho*, **NEPHO**, and its primary meaning is a physical one, namely, "to abstain from wine," and so passes spiritually into the general sense of calm, temperate, collected in spirit, self-controlled. It is used five times elsewhere,\* but only this once in connection with prayer.

Another has suggested that "many

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\* 1 Thess. 5:6, 8. 2 Tim. 4:5. 1 Pet. 1:13. 1 Pet. 5:8.

things intoxicate which are not wine," and that one can be drunk with worldly gaiety and worldly business, with pride, or envy or anger. How could one pray in such a condition! We must bring with us when we pray a mind that is steady and composed; if we do not have it we must seek it in quietness before God. Many of our best lessons are missed for the lack of it. That we have been permitted to pray at all is the marvel, and when we do pray the very best of intellect and heart is the very least we should expect to devote to this high and mighty privilege.

5. We find next, in Colossians 4: 2, another word which tells us that

WE ARE TO BE VIGILANT WHEN WE PRAY

The passage reads, "Continue steadfastly in prayer and *watch* in the same with thanksgiving." The word is <sup>GREGOREO.</sup> *gregoreo*, and is the same word used by the Master in Matt. 26: 41 and Mark 14: 38, when He said to His three disciples, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation," and the same word

He uses just before in telling them to tarry in the distance and *watch* while He prayed. The word is quite general, and while the Colossian passage calls chiefly for a spiritual emphasis, the Gospel passages show that the physical reference is not to be entirely ignored. The prayer life, to be successful, calls for the most rigid mental attentiveness. There is sometimes so much self-indulgence and mental lassitude in our attempts at prayer that the good which might be ours is lost entirely. The soul must be on its guard. If the Evil One can change the hour that ought to bring us strength from above into a season of distracted mind-wandering, how surely will he do it. One always prays best when the mind is clear, keen and alert. Only so can the senses be exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5: 14). The use of this word *gregoreo* gives no sanction to any but an active, energetic prayer.

As a figure of this spiritual circumspection, it will be interesting to note the use

of the same word in a physical sense in the following passages: 1 Peter 5:8; Matt. 24:43; Mark 13:34; Acts 20:31.

6. From this same passage, Colossians 4:2, comes a second lesson from which we learn that

WE ARE TO MAKE PRAYER THE CHIEF BUSINESS  
OF OUR LIFE

Besides urging us to watchfulness in prayer, the passage says, "Continue steadfastly in prayer." The same message is found in Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4, and also in Rom. 12:12, while <sup>PROSKAR-</sup><sub>TEREO</sub>. the same expression is also found in five other passages without reference to prayer. The two words, "continue steadfastly," are one in Greek. It is *proskartereo*, and the underlying thought of the word is that of "giving exclusive attention to a thing." In Acts 6:4 the Apostles told the other disciples to select seven of their number who might look after the daily ministrations of food, since they themselves must be relieved of this *business*, that they might give themselves (con-

tinue steadfastly) to prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. The Apostles were to "give constant attention" to this latter even as the other disciples were to the former. It was to be their business, just as serving tables was called the business of the others.

When, in Mark 3:9, Jesus gave a command "that a small ship should wait on Him," He used this word, and when, in Acts 10:7, we are told that certain soldiers "waited continually" on Cornelius, it is this word *proskartereo* that is used to express such service. It was their business, their one chief duty, to attend this Roman Centurian. Think of a merchant prince pleading the pressure of other duties as an excuse for neglecting his business! Prayer, God would have us know, is our business. How neglect it, therefore, and hope to succeed in our religious life! When we "enter the closet" we are told to "shut the door." We are supposed to be there for a purpose; important matters are on hand. Successful business demands vigorous

thought, but our indolent minds sometimes so affect our bodies that we go to sleep on our knees. Successful business averts bankruptcy only by enthusiasm, and thousands of Christians are in spiritual disaster to-day because they have been heedless of the spirit of business in their devotions.

7. There is yet another word and one other lesson in advance of any yet learned. It is the lesson which comes from the word Paul used when he told the Christians at Rome to "labor fervently" (strive, Revised Version) with him in their prayers for his sake (Rom. 15:30). It is the word he used when he said of Epaphras, in Colossians 4:12, that he "always *labored fervently* for them in his prayer." From this word comes the message that

WE ARE TO MAKE PRAYER A MATTER OF LIFE  
AND DEATH

The word is *agonizo*, and is the word from which we derive the English "agonize." Translated by the Authorized Ver-

sion into "laboring fervently," it was made to read in the Revised Version "striving," but the English reader will hardly grasp the fullness of its import until he sees it written "agonize." It is really a tragic word and one we would hardly expect to see used in this connection. Do we not find ourselves thinking that if this is what it means to pray, how little praying, at least such praying, have we really ever done? To pray after this fashion means the absolutely unreserved devotement of every power of one's soul and mind and body to the doing of it.

The word as used in describing other effort will help us a good deal in our study of its use here.

(a) In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul says, "Everyone that striveth (*agonizomenos*) for the mastery is temperate in all things." We are to agonize in prayer as does an athlete in the arena for the prize he so much covets. The very last measure of such a man's strength goes into the con-

test. In Hebrews 12:1 the "race" is called an "agony" (*agonia*).

(b) In 1 Tim. 6:12 the young soldier for Christ is told to "fight the good fight of faith," the same thing which Paul said of himself that he had done (2 Tim. 4:7). It literally reads "agonize the good agony of faith." We are to agonize in prayer as does a faithful soldier on the field of battle. Is there any service so desperately earnest as his? and it is unselfish and persistent as well. If we prayed as he fights we would often turn into victory what otherwise would be humiliating and disappointing defeat.

(c) In John 18:36 Jesus says, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight (*agonizonto*) that I should not be delivered to the Jews." Our striving in prayer is to be like the agony of a friend fighting to save another's life. If it be like this all the finer qualities of our nature will go into it. It will be unselfish and heroic. It will be resolute and determined, and neither delay nor any-

thing else will discourage us, and nothing but the clearly revealed will of God will cause us to loosen our hold upon Him for the thing we have asked.

(d) In Hebrews 12:4 the writer says, “Ye have not resisted unto blood, striving (*agonizomenoī*) against sin.” He has been talking about martyrdom. Sympathy with Christ means suffering with Christ. “To you it is given not only to believe on His name, but also to suffer for His sake.” If we bring this spirit into our prayers we will join hands with God to bring about the answer. True prayer is costly! It means labor, sacrifice and, if need be, martyrdom.

(e) In Luke 13:24 are found the Master’s words urging us to eternal life. He says, “strive (*agonizesthe*) to enter in at the straight gate.” We are to agonize in prayer as a truly awakened sinner agonizes to save his soul. It is a matter of mighty concern to him when once the true condition of his soul flashes upon him. Fancy yourself back at that place

with a knowledge of eternal matters such as you now have! With what intensity of desire, with what earnestness of soul, would you endeavor to lay hold upon eternal life, that you might not perish. Something like that, with the same consuming desire and the same intense application to the matter at hand, must we pray if our prayers are to accomplish the will of God in our lives.

(f) There is, however, one example from which we feel we can learn more about this kind of prayer than any study of words could ever bring us. It is the Gethsemane agony of our Lord. With uncovered head let us stand within the shadows and reverently behold. "Being in an agony (*agonia*)" says the evangelist (Luke 22:44) "He prayed more earnestly" (*ektenesteron*, comparative degree of the word *ektenos*, page 268, meaning "intense," "stretched out." See also Heb. 5:7, "With strong crying and tears" His soul being sorrowful unto death) "until His sweat was, as it were, great drops of

blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22: 44).

Here we see what agonizing in prayer really is. Here is prayer at its best, even though the cup did not pass from Him. It needs a mighty concern to pray like that. A concern that comes only from realizing something of what Jesus realized in those agonizing moments. We need first the Gethsemane vision; the hideousness of sin, the horror of its consequences, and then something of the mind of Christ that will keep us from turning back and bring us into fellowship with His sufferings for the deliverance of this world from the just judgment of God for its sin. Then we shall know what really we have never known before—what it means to pray.

Oh, Thou Man of Sorrows, we wonder how little the disciples really knew when they said, "Lord, teach us to pray," how great would be the lesson they would have to learn if the full answer to that petition came. But we have seen it now, seen it in word, in precept and in Thy own most

holy example, and coming fresh from this study, we see now how little we can pray without Thy Spirit to inspire and to help, and humbly confessing before God our own past poverty in prayer, we voice with deep desire the petition, "Lord Jesus, teach us to pray."









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